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Challenging Fragmentation:
Overcoming the Subject-Object Divide through the Integration of Art-Making and Material Culture Studies

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Challenging Fragmentation: Overcoming the Subject-Object Divide through the Integration of Art-Making and Material Culture Studies

Abstract:
This practice-led thesis explores ways in which to integrate art and material culture studies as a manifestation of philosophy’s process thread. In doing so, its goal is to generate a praxis which is able to come to holistic terms with the fragmenting dualism of subject-object binaries. By seizing my own subjectivity in its representation of this problem, the thesis develops a performance-led practice which seeks to overcome the barriers that its divisive ‘I’ presents to process. This interdisciplinary project is an explicit response to the figure of Friedrich Nietzsche; his bearing helps to constitute its methodology and repertoire as his presence is creatively teased from the pages of his own books.

Part One of the thesis discusses how the mimetic aims of artistic representation were harnessed to challenge my own subjectivity’s singular sense of authority. Thereafter, Nietzsche’s pre-modern temperament comes to enable a holistic consideration of the perceptual ambiguity within Jacques Lacan’s geometric model of ‘seeing things’. Part Two engages with representation as a method of making difference for the bridging of subject-object divisions. This occurs as subjective experience and is extended to some inorganic others, producing creative outcomes which aim to access a cosmological principle of affect that is identified with Nietzsche’s thesis of will to power. The third part of this thesis aligns the research aim, of making apparent the oneness of the cosmos, with the shamanic dimensions of some vintage slapstick cinema. In its development, it comes to terms with the subjective gaze and identifies process-led strategies for challenging and changing its outlooks. This provides a background for Part Four, which marks the beginning of my attempts to engage the gaze of other people in processes that procure and ideally affect their perspectives.

While the first four parts of the thesis demonstrate the progress of the research project through the deployment of art and its affecting capacities, its final two parts put the work of philosophy into aesthetic effects, and represent artworks that constitute
elements of the thesis itself. Part Five evidences my art practice re-engaging with the world through a project which holistically involves the outlooks of subjects, whilst nevertheless challenging their perceptual precepts. Part Six discusses a performative experiment that consolidates and tests the research findings in a potentially affective structure, expressed through Laurence Halprin’s RSVP cycle. Finally, as it reflects on the potential healing capacities of my practical research and the possibilities for ‘doing’ philosophy, the thesis details how an art-making that embraces both visual and material cultures through the eventness of performance might be able to overcome the problematic perceptual divides that limit the progress of process logics.
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Author’s Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

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Papers and Publications

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2011:
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Introduction

The Effects of Division

The Western metaphysical tradition’s recognition of a subject-object divide presupposes that the object within its binary represents a passively powerful entity. This divide can be recognized whenever a perceived ‘otherness’ is rationalized in terms of a radical difference. Indeed, the existential ground of the recognized other (one that is often known as an object), is understood to be irreconcilable with the perceiving human’s own subjective basis. The subjectivity which is thereafter identified with human perception refers to a human being in its deference to the inevitability of perceived otherness. This arguably provides for the sense of radical difference identified above.

Such a divide describes a prevalent understanding of human selfhood which supposes it represents a being that is completely separate from, and independent of, other forms. The apparent division underpins a partial (i.e. anthropocentric) attitude toward the existence of things which has people seeing objects standing before them in complete accordance with their designated roles in our human worlds (Heidegger, 1977, 128–129). For reasons which I will come to outline (below, in section vii), such anthropocentric engagements with objects have come to define many material culture studies, leading to a curious lacuna in the humanities for appreciations of things themselves. My research therefore begins with the supposition that the process of overcoming the subject-object divide would remove a significant barrier to the restoration of an appreciation of objects. It proposes that a performance-led approach is

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1 Given its influence upon (and through) European metaphysics, the fragmenting view of things and its subsequent understandings is described in this thesis as a Western or Eurocentric perspective (Desmond, 2003, 145).
able to do something to address this omission through a process of healing, which would precede an alternative holistic outlook, and involves engaging with the activity of things.

This practice-led thesis therefore explores ways in which to integrate art and material culture studies, both of which I studied prior to this doctoral project, in order to come to holistic terms with the fragmenting dualism of subject-object binaries. In doing so, its goal is to generate a praxis which operates as an embodied manifestation of philosophy’s process thread. The term ‘process philosophy’ is often understood as a catchphrase for the philosophical work of Alfred North Whitehead and his followers. Nevertheless, it might also be used with retrospect to include all philosophies that have recognized life in (non-biological) terms of a ‘striving through which all things endeavour to bring new features to realization’ (Rescher, 2000, 3). In this sense—for reasons which will become fully apparent through this written element of the thesis—I would suggest that Friedrich Nietzsche is a pioneering exemplar.

ii )

The Research Methodology

My research practice represents the influence of my foundation and undergraduate art programmes inasmuch as it reproduces something of their thematic interest in drawings, paintings, video artefacts and photographs. However, a previous focus on the creation of artefacts (for exhibition) is not my overriding concern for this project; it merely describes a format for the performance of art-making itself. This is to say that the intended art objects, which are pursued through the craft of their making, defer in research significance to the process of their creation. This method is expected to hold the effects of the subject-object divide open to testing as it privileges doing over and above the art’s object outcomes.

My strategy of leading with the performance of art-making is understood to assist a testing, and an overcoming, of the subject-object binary through an insistence on embodiment. I believe that this can challenge conventional meanings and come to new terms with the notion of ‘objectivity’. My method can be aligned with, and explained through, the reasoning that underpins Donna Haraway’s feminist advocacy of ‘situated knowledge’: an embodied approach to the question of objects that understands that any individual’s physical encounters with things have a sensual richness, pregnant with potential meanings, which can form a challenge to prevalent objects and their
perceptual processes. This in turn can establish the basis of alternative objects and (so) new modes of perception (Haraway, 1988, 579).

Like Haraway's situated knowledge, my art-making methodology maintains that embodied experiences provide for a significant encounter with things in their potential to understand human relationships with objects. Moreover, the pursuit of new object experiences cannot be represented or engaged through conventional intellectual methods alone because these tend to gift authority to the very perspectives that sustain familiar ways of seeing (which I am trying to overcome) as they refer to accepted linguistic standards and structures.

As this thesis registers art-making bringing forth actual objects, its methodology aims to exceed the deconstructions (of the hegemonic worldview) that come with its level of discursive challenge to inevitable and passive objects. I say this because it yields something of positivism's 'concrete' authority as it shares representations of new objects. But the emphasis on the embodied activity of art-making performances also negotiates the 'trap' which awaits those who seek to challenge prevalent epistemologies—namely that their projects risk becoming reactionary political contests (Haraway, 1988, 579).

To expand through Haraway's model of situated knowledge: she came to advocate embodied epistemology further to her experience of trying to deconstruct science by showing the historical specificity (and so the contestability) of its 'layers'. She believed this would sustain the creation of an alternative notion of objectivity, underpinned by a feminist gaze (Haraway, 1988, 578). However, Haraway became concerned by this project in isolation—which privileged object outcomes over the process of their objects' discovery—because its emphasis on new objects (rather than their making) ultimately conjoined with what it opposed, especially as many scientists accepted that their understandings came about through constructing and arguing with whatever objects were present to them (Haraway, 1988, 579). If some feminists found this object-oriented project to be entirely satisfactory—as long as the protagonists lived in reflexive relation to their powers of domination (i.e. they did not intend to deny their agency in the production of objects)—then Haraway understood that it transformed the original epistemological intention into a political one: it being more of a critical undermining, or reaction, than an alternative mode of (knowledge making) existence as such. Given this, Haraway pulled back from this project and apparently approached the outlook of process philosophy, as she instead became determined to emphasize the contingency of objects—or the issue of objects being defined through embodied meetings
Haraway’s performance-led manoeuvre is epistemologically important because it pursues a material reality which contains subjects and objects (as opposed to a reality which is controlled by subjects as it is anthropocentrically expected to answer to their needs).

My art-making research methodology continues Haraway’s pursuit of a subject-object containment. Furthermore, I believe that its consistency with process philosophy foreshadows a way of actually doing the latter’s affecting work. The videos contained in the two DVDs affixed to the inside of this written work’s back cover (and to be reintroduced below) provide traces of process affects which support this notion; I hope they assist concentration on embodied meetings (which resist the primacy for being that describes a Western transcendent tendency) through their acknowledgement/invocation of my own subjective presence as this brings some efficacious metaphysical baggage to the meeting. In this sense, the videos represent my methodological avoidance of any theory of passive or ‘innocent’ powers, without any nihilistic denial of my own subjective agency. As the videos refer to particular experiences they also hopefully diminish the negative effects of my writing’s discursive language, particularly as words can impose a reductive standard on events. Given that they are also foregrounded as records of events past, the videos might also be suggestive of how the ‘spirit’ of process inhabits an epistemology of embodied performance.

My art-making’s insistence on my own seeing’s embodied nature anticipates the interest in visual culture described below, particularly as the latter seems to similarly recognize the possibility of visually engaged researchers who are present to themselves, even as it critiques a gaze that has been created through the desires of people. This recovery of seeing is paradoxically supported by the latter, particularly as their pursuit of identity somewhat depends on selfhood’s capacity for joining subject and object together (Haraway, 1988, 586). In principle, this means that anthropocentricity can be distinguished from the subject’s ability to join. My art-making’s exploitation of seeing is, then, understood to hold the promise of a process perspective which can overcome the subject-object divide (Haraway, 1988, 586). It also describes a thematic engagement with theatricality, particularly as it offers some opportunity to contrast the activity of creative performers with the visual experiences of Western audiences who might understand themselves to be passive observers. In Parts One and Two, this allows mimetic acts to be considered in terms of both difference and identity. It also facilitates Part Three and Part Four’s operation as it pursues tragedy through comedy.
The final two parts of the thesis continue this engagement through an invocation of the theatrical presence which describes the attitude of ‘on-stage’ performers.

This methodological approach operates in some sympathy with the origins of the word ‘object’ as it lies in the Latin expression *obicere*. The term recognizes the challenge which is presented by others—it simply means to cast in the way of or ‘throw before’ (Partridge, 1983, 445). This etymology helps me to diminish any notions of an object’s inevitability as it aligns the process of perceiving things with a challenging event. Additionally, models such as actor-network-theory (ANT), which was invoked during my master’s degree in Material Culture Studies, influence my understanding of systems of technology and their cultural spread (see Lazzari, 2005, 191–210).

Such models of technological transmission affirm that people alter the material things they encounter, but they also suggest that material things affect the operations of the humans they meet. This suggests that things bring something to their encounters with people. In so doing, ANT seems to reconceive material culture encounters as sites of mutual affect. This defies the linearity associated with the subject-object divide and hints at the possibility of some existential equality between people and things, so adding urgency to the perceived need to engage with things themselves. It also sustains the logic of my performance method in two ways: (1) it identifies change, through engagement, with the activity of physical matter; (2) it raises a material culture profile for that one meeting which occurs between any two things—suggesting that activity (which describes encounters) might be a site through which a healing could occur.

The aforementioned aspects of ANT inform a research design that enables me to question the content, nature and ethics of my own Western perception of things. This makes the overcoming in my perception—conceived as a task of healing of an ontological rift between a Western outlook and its perceived others—seem desirable to me. My strategy of leading with performance, and art-making in particular, is expected to assist a positive engagement with activity—one capable of staving off the Western tendency to engage with objects in linear fashions. I believe that art-making may help thwart the latter because it seems to keep objects in view as effects of practice. This plan is informed by former experiences of art practice which occasionally created a sense that I, as much as any artefact, was being formed through the process of creating. A level of play and speculation I associate with art also helps me to embrace a questioning approach and attitude (formerly identified with the Latin term, *obicere*) by helping to ensure that the art-as-research occurs with a subjectively disturbing paradox
(inasmuch as objects come after knowing, in Western epistemology) of unknown objects (Petruccioli, 1993, 135).

A further performance-led check on my Western perceptual tendencies comes through challenging conversations which occur between myself and Friedrich Nietzsche. As I will detail in sections ix and x below, my research engagement with Nietzsche exceeds a simple engagement with his philosophical argument. Rather, his figure is teased from the pages of his books through the creation of a guiding phantasm who constantly speaks to me and, on occasion, holds me in his persuasive custody. This often occurs in a fashion which has me recalling the diplomacy of Brian Clough, who proclaimed he was prepared to talk with those who contested his ideas, until—after 20 minutes—all would decide that he was right (Clough cited in Coggin, 2013, online).

Nietzsche’s phantasm is an enterprise that exceeds any familiar idea of reading, as its productive synergy anticipates (as much as it informs) something of my creative relationship with objects. It is this lively outcome (one recognized as an experience consistent with, as much as it was about, process) that variously supports and disciplines the tangible art produced through this research process.

Process Philosophy
The chief concerns of my BA in fine art (2006) and my MA in material culture studies (2008) can best be described as sculptural because a linking thematic interest in figurative statues seemed to challenge my viewing’s supposition that human subjects and material objects were separated by an ontological chasm. Nevertheless, and as I suggest above, my ensuing PhD project was originally framed as a response to a distinguishable—if similarly disturbing and structurally related—implication of ANT.

To expand: at the time of this project’s nascent conception in 2007, ANT was beginning to exceed its ostensible social science agenda and commence a challenge the epistemological bearing of anthropocentric outlooks in the wider academy. This came through ANT’s emphasis on relations, especially as it raised a challenging epistemological profile for meetings and (so) the territory between things (Barad, 2007,

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2 Brian Clough was a British football manager from 1965 to 1993. He had an outstanding record and famously won two European Cups with Nottingham Forest in 1979 and 1980.
An appreciation of this area seemed to be useful for overcoming the subject-object divide because its awareness meant acknowledging the important bearing of things themselves in material culture events. I also understood that its insubstantial occurrence could be explored together with its substantial contributors through the doing I associated with art-making; a method that could perhaps operate with, and through, Friedrich Nietzsche’s process philosophy which challenges Western ways of seeing and the latter’s perception of radical difference (that sustains an idea that there is something special about human being) especially.

The Western idea of some radical independence and specialness in human being is upheld through a network of institutions. These include prevalent religious and political power structures. Such systems arguably nurture notions of personal liberty and, when required, achieve their ends by propagating and exploiting (cynically or otherwise) the same notions of personal autonomy. The complex, which supports the seductive idea of some independent being, seems to withstand in a popular secular philosophy as well. This engages with the transcendental notion of morality even as it might accept that people act in the midst of forces beyond their control (as evidenced in Badger, 2011, 25). However, it is philosophy’s process perspectives that seem to offer an alternative, and thoroughly distributing, approach to activity. To expand, the unity supposed by process philosophy privileges the totality of relations as generative of any instant’s beings. To accept this is to also acknowledge that any given moment is born of outcomes of innumerable other relations, as they shoot through the entirety of infinite time as much as any immediate ‘now’ (Nietzsche, 1974, 273–274).

The holistic outlook of process philosophy presents existence in terms of a dynamic unity, of forms in flux (or beings becoming). As such it contains all diversity in a creative oneness. This model of reality is evocative of art in terms of its transformative processes and its affordance of stimulating encounters with wisdoms that might otherwise be perceived as redundant, naïve, or just plain wrong:

That ‘all things flow’ [...] is the theme of some of the best Hebrew poetry in the psalms; it appears as one of the first generalizations of Greek philosophy in the form of the saying of Heraclitus [...] and in all stages of civilization its recollection lends its pathos to poetry. Without doubt, if we are to go back to that ultimate, integral experience, unwarped by the sophistications of theory, that experience whose elucidation is the final aim of philosophy,

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3 This notion underpins Friedrich Nietzsche’s idea of fate (invoked in the following section), as it must be distinguished from the prescription that might be associated with a notion of destiny.
the flux of things is one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system.

(Whitehead, 1985, 208)

Whitehead’s appeals to Hebrew poetry, and the famous saying of Heraclitus (as it refers to a statement on the impossibility of a man bathing in the same river twice), accept the possibility of a human’s full involvement—i.e. mental and physical (though the distinction, here, is just to help explain)—with the task of coming to terms with its unfamiliar things. People are acknowledged to be part of an awe-inspiring process that contains the confounded subject, as it is newly opened up to a whole existence in flux.

It is in their capacity to remake experience in terms of one happening creative event—through, rather than in spite of, the manifold of things and experiences—that process perspectives may be able to assist healing projects such as mine. This is because the ‘generalizations’ of process approaches seem to have the potential to help reframe particulars (as these include the subjective ‘I’ itself) in the context of one shared fate.

Past and Present

As this thesis sees me attempting to overcome the subject-object divide, it also works to close the gap between art practice (i.e. a disciplined creative process of bringing forth something ‘new’), art history (as it provides for a record of former perspectives), and those objects that suggest some inevitability in their experience (through their appearance in contextual structures). This might amount to the pursuit of an engagement with matter’s agency, which is an inherent material culture issue in its active contribution to any social world. I believe this process is existentially important for the reasons described above. It might also be understood to be of some benefit to an emerging aspect of archaeology which is acknowledging the challenging influence of ANT.

Michael Shanks has described traditional archaeological projects as ‘a sort of relay’, wherein an object such as a pot becomes a vehicle that is supposed to take the mind of the ‘archaeologist to the mind of the potter’ (Shanks, 1992, 88). In these engagements any affecting aspect of the object engagement or happening, itself, is downgraded (in importance) as researchers are supposed to pursue an anonymous, historical, human being—one that might represent an absent subjectivity. The general negation of things
themselves, in this material method, is arguably aggravated by the fact that its representation occurs primarily on the terms of the researching (rather than the researched) identity. Michel Foucault has recognized that this approach to objects is typically disposed to a self-securing pursuit of the contemporary subject’s own origins. Moreover, given that the studying subject is not critically engaged in its own process, Foucault suggests that its academic outcomes amount to questionable statements about the Western subject’s own character and status:

[T]hat theme of the origin […] by which we avoid the difference of our present […] allows us to avoid an analysis of practice […] which, above all, concerns the status of the subject. It is this discussion that you would like to suppress […] by pursuing […] genesis and system, synchrony and development, relation and cause, structure and history. Are you sure you are not practising a theoretical metathesis?

(Foucault, 2005, 225)

ANT’s recognition that things help constitute events promises an alternative engagement with material forms (Latour et al. 2011, 89). Some material culture researchers are already wrestling with the difficulty of accessing objects in terms of their doing, an issue that Douglas Bolender summarises as the temporality of an event from a material perspective (Bolender, 2010, 9). The theme, of the material side to material culture, is becoming more conspicuously absent as postmodern archaeology (through its pluralizing emphasis on different cultural identities) is coming to re-evaluate ‘important’ historical events as mere ‘surface disturbances’ occurring upon some bigger tide (Fernand Braudel cited in Morris, 2000, 4): one that might rightly be associated with process. This is a notion that is complicated (and given some further urgency) through its appreciation and influence in those pre-modern contexts which archaeologists have traditionally pursued—without paying heed to their existential (and so epistemological) challenges (Morris, 2000, 292).

The implications, of returning archaeology’s discursively defined matter to the sensible realm of actuality—through a process-structure—could scarcely be more far-reaching. It demands a fresh focus on material affects as they allow the past to be appreciated as being, in some sense, with us. Establishing some methodology for accessing this affect is, then, rightly the task of the material culture discipline, which

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4 The engagement, then, pushes beyond—as it inverses the emphasis of—the presently popular discourse which is interested in the way that the past has shaped the manner in which we think now.
(amongst other things) services archaeology through its address of fundamental, object-led, questions. Given this, my research might be understood to anticipate an interdisciplinary engagement between performance and material culture studies.

What I am detecting is the need for a kind of experiential genealogy (a theme I will return to in Part One). This accepts the capacity of creativity to rupture any categorical divide with the past as it engages researchers with some cosmological constancy, in flow. If this necessarily visits the micro-affects of momentary encounters, then it must also overcome their appearance to a human subject, which tends to perceive precious little in an object’s perception to suggest either its emergence out of a past, or its continuing momentum towards some future (i.e. the subject simply recognizes an object, it tends not to reflect on how that experience happened to come about) (Howe, 2003, 115). My engagement, then, might be understood to go against material culture studies’ inherited archaeological instinct, as the latter typically pursues the origin of contemporary subjects. An ease with this mode of engagement might be registered in the way that historical institutions typically present object displays behind glass and alongside linguistic explanations, as if they stand in for ancient material culture experiences; yet the cautionary signs which say ‘Do Not Touch’—to effect the same engagement for unscreened objects—might serve as some reminder that objects have more to offer than that which meets a viewer’s gaze.

The retrodictory logics, to which a process genealogy appeals, have some useful precedent in the ‘experimental archaeology’ that is now established (through the work of Gill Juleff, amongst others) as a legitimate material culture research method. This approach to the past often works within conjectural models that are delimited by the work of traditional archaeology. However, unlike the history-led equivalent, experimental archaeology refuses any notion of dwelling in the past. Rather, it performs events that make archaeological objects and scenarios manifest in contemporary environments as they accept and welcome (to admittedly different, and contested, degrees) the uncontrolled contribution of all the elements that come with a given location (for a summary of Juleff’s work see Wilford, 1996, online).

The material outcomes of experimental archaeology are typically compared with supposed correlates in an artefact record. This adds to, as it complicates, a material-performance archive that dialectically refines subsequent experiments as its

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5 Gill Juleff (currently based at the University of Exeter) has refined smelting scenarios which have harnessed the weather and topography in regions of Sri Lanka, to reverse-engineer the ancient production of the Damascus steel once prized for sword making.
practitioners inductively pursue the scenarios that will yield artefacts similar to those that might be found in some given collection.\textsuperscript{6} Such research might be understood as a relaxed and receptive rehearsal for a more familiar—and formal—archaeological reconstruction: one that arguably enjoys its journey with matter, more than the prescription that is represented through the latter form of reproduction (Marsh and Ferguson, 2010). It is in its playfulness, as much as the inductive and embedded methods, that experimental archaeology assists in holding the disciplinary door ajar for process thinking and creative practices.

\textbf{v ) Parallels/Thresholds}

A further archaeological challenge to the disciplined distinction between creativity and objects, could be understood to come through Colin Renfrew’s 2003 publication, \textit{Figuring it Out}. This book relishes a (restrained) prospect of some ‘parallel’ engagement between art and material culture studies; Renfrew’s argument, for engaging the latter with art, adopts a philosophical tone as he states that each of the two disciplines ‘looks critically at what we are and how we know what we are’ (Renfrew, 2006, 7). But it goes on to suggest—without fully exploring—a practical basis for some further disciplinary concordance, as he dwells on archaeological excavations in terms of their material \textit{affects} (rather than any recovered effects):

[T]here is the play of light and dark: the feeling of intense activity during excavation in the narrow space, promoted by the glare of electric lights [...]. And the yellow plastic of the helmets of the team of archaeologists strike a strongly incongruous visual note among the harmonies of brown – stone, soil, bone. These are the sense impressions of the present rather than the past, and these too are relevant as we evaluate the contrast [...].

Most are difficult to capture and record [...]. But it is this complex of sense impressions that constitutes the present reality, not merely the measurements that we seek to abstract and record.

(Renfrew, 2006, 40–41)

\textsuperscript{6} The fact that differing scenarios might produce the same material outcomes is accepted as the source of this approach’s greatest controversies. Yet this might highlight the need to refine archaeological sensibilities, rather than simply negate the experimental method.
This citation shows how contemporary material culture studies subsumes archaeology (which has, historically, pursued past societies rather than material things per se)\textsuperscript{7} by incorporating it in the former’s more comprehensive engagement with materiality. The passage also accepts embodied sensation as a realm of overlap with art.\textsuperscript{8} Through qualifying and summing-up sensual experiences as ‘impressions’, Renfrew seems to redouble his appeal to creativity as he describes the presence of matter in terms of an active transformation.

Renfrew further disturbs chronological and (so) disciplinary boundaries when he reminds his readers that ‘[t]he past reality too was made up of a complex of experiences and feelings, and it also was experienced by human beings similar in some ways to ourselves’ (Renfrew, 2006, 40–41). If this suggests researchers can use their bodies to recover past experiences, he nevertheless goes on to stress the unrivalled primacy of scientific data, as he supposes that it might become ‘richer’ through, and never rivalled by, art-led activity (Renfrew, 2006, 43). In this sense the author appeared (to me) to invite some research into (as he stopped short of engaging) the potential for an integrating encounter between art and material culture studies. Although my contrasting perception of an art opportunity—rather than the register of a limit—concedes a level of rebelliousness, it nevertheless shares its sentiment with some creatively inclined peers (presently working in archaeology and material culture studies) who have recently seized upon the agency of the same publication to suppose the possibility of some breach of the threshold between art and material culture studies.

For instance, a session for the 2010 Theoretical Archaeology Conference, entitled ‘An Artful Integration? Possible Futures for Archaeology and Creative Work’ (organized by Maxwell & Hadley, 2010), supported Renfrew’s sense that a meeting of art and material culture studies could be productive of new engagements with the question of materiality. One paper by Eva Bosch was particularly illuminating through its apparent paradox: her paper, ‘Is there More to Prehistoric Art than Archaeology?’, urged a re-evaluation of touch as a research methodology (Bosch, 2010). Yet, Bosch progressed her case through images of the 10,000 year old stencilled hands which embellish the

\textsuperscript{7} The etymological origins of archaeology lie in the Greek word \textit{arkhe} meaning beginning, origin or first place. This affords some slippage between the word ‘archaeology’ and the phrase ‘material culture studies’, as the latter might literally translate into some ‘application to the honours that belong to matter’ (Partridge, 1983).

\textsuperscript{8} The scene ‘painted’ by Renfrew contains the goal of some archaeological effect, yet it does not defer to such an object’s historical importance. In this sense it illustrates how archaeology, in giving birth to material culture studies, has bequeathed the academy a child that is bigger than its matrix.
Cueva de las Manos in Argentina. This invoked a representational complex—i.e. photographic pictures of representations of touching—which conceded something to the ocularcentricity of the Western subject, even as her presentation was pressing for an alternative. This affirmed what had been suggested to me by Renfrew’s visual bias in his account of archaeology above: the overcoming of the subject-object divide is likely to hinge on an engagement which comes through the process of seeing.

The bias towards visuality can be understood as a symptom of the Western subject. This understanding foreshadows my interest in the field of visual culture (introduced in the following section) as both an interdisciplinary discourse—where material culture and art presently meet—and a movement for change which seems to recognize that the visual field is a site where the subject can be recognized and engaged, for the process of overcoming its own divisive outlook.

vi )

Visual Culture

Martin Jay has suggested that the field of visual culture had a defining moment in 1988 when attendees of a Dia Art Foundation conference, in New York, gathered together to discuss ‘the question of the cultural determinations of visual experience in the broadest sense’ (Jay, 2011, 40). These proceedings apparently encouraged conjecture on a supposition that ocular views might be analogous with intellectual ‘world-views’, and so formed through an interested lens constructed in the perceiver’s social environment (Jay, 2011, 41). This speculation apparently came after a sense that the field of visual studies was cohering around an intersection of the anthropological application of linguistics (pioneered by Claude Lévi-Strauss) with Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time model of the human subject (it effectively being pulled through the world by the assignations of its culture).9

The degree to which notions of the ‘innocent’ eye would subsequently come to be disparaged might be registered in a key 1995 publication edited by Chris Jenks, and simply entitled Visual Culture. This book’s contributors seem to agree that the implications of the aforementioned intellectual junction could be most compellingly evidenced in the fashionably brash, and arguably neo-Marxist, philosophies of Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault—the content of Visual Culture’s essays

9 This notion of a pulling through the world comes after my understanding of Heidegger’s influential notion of Dasein. This relates to a human being which understands itself in terms of tasks which are described and delimited by a perceived world (Heidegger, 2008).
generally endorsing their poststructural suspicions (of a perceptual field of pure information) as chapter after chapter identified perception and its perceived things with the power, and strategies, of ‘civilizing’ institutions.

As the book’s contributors rallied to support ideas of a culturally determined visual field, their differing academic backgrounds also suggest that the visual turn was poised to cut across the divides between disciplines within the humanities. Chris Jenks’ own introduction to Visual Culture highlights the poststructural basis of this anticipated coherence, as he supposes that modernity had relieved the world of some of its more enriching dimensions—by transforming it into a display of images:

Throughout modernity, vision has [...] become divested of its originality, in ways both real and imagined. In a perceptual environment of rapidly changing and infinitely replaceable images and representations much of what is ‘seen’ is pre-received [...]. As Marx originally suggested, nature no longer offers itself free of the ‘sensuous’ engagement of human labour [...]. But more than this, the visual experience of the real is often second[hand?].

(Jenks, 1998, 10)

In a subsequent chapter of the book, entitled ‘Reporting and Visualising’, Andrew Barry succinctly captures the challenging connotations of this assessment, through a far-reaching review of the visual paradigm of auditing. This undermines the idea that its perceptual process simply made systems transparent to the parties operating on their outside:

[A]udits are not passive techniques; they foster the development of practices and actions which it is possible to audit. The object which the audit ‘sees’ is an object which the institution of audit has helped to make. Thus, there is always the possibility that a discrepancy may emerge between the object of audit and a ‘real’ object which can never be adequately represented.

(Barry, 1998, 48–49)

As Barry’s essay would come to allow this model of official inspection to represent the event of visuality per se it propagated the newly iconoclastic (yet also passively resigned) mood of the visual studies project. Nevertheless, even as this position was to become something of the orthodox intellectual outlook (for the visual turn), some notable anthropologists and philosophers began cautioning that its perspective was repeating the mistakes of modernity. This latter resistance supposed that if the modern
approach, to the perceived, faithfully identified its own discerning perceptions with the truthful essence of some sensed thing, then postmodernism’s growing investment in the inevitability of culturally determined perceptions was producing a milieu that was no-less anthropocentric (Harman, 2005, 15). The perceived human bias explains John Gray’s disenchantment with the postmodern academic climate, which he described as ‘only the old anthropocentric conceit, rendered anew in the idiom of a secular Gnostic’ (Gray, 2003, 50). Tim Ingold evidently shared similar concerns; this led him to suppose that the poststructural logics of the visual turn were continuing a notorious modern dichotomy—even as it repositioned its ideas of ‘the body’:

Formerly placed with the organism on the side of biology, the body has now reappeared as a ‘subject’ on the side of culture. Far from collapsing the Cartesian dualism of subject and object, this move actually serves to reproduce it.

(Ingold, 2007, 170)

What Gray and Ingold seem to be demanding is some academic adequacy to the earth, as they understood it to be constituted through all configurations of matter. Today, the disturbing epistemological effects of such disputes seem to be weakening poststructuralism’s claim on visual studies.

The introduction to a 2010 visual studies publication, The Aesthetic Dimension of Visual Culture, provided Ondrej Dadejik and Jakub Stejskal with an opportunity to share a survey of its developing field. This recognized the discursive primacy of a ‘French iconaclasm’ (this accepting the philosophies of Debord, Baudrillard and Foucault) in their contemporaries’ accounts of visual culture, while also acknowledging significant pockets of resistance to any poststructural monopoly of its academic discourse (Dadejik & Stejskal, 2010).

Their essay’s progression registers multiple components to this opposition, but eventually comes to identify a clear ‘counter-current’ in the apparent revival of iconographical and formalist approaches to visuality (Dadejik & Stejskal, 2010, ix–xvii). As these unorthodox perspectives are understood to engage perceived things in terms of their apparent capacity for affect, they hint at visuality’s congruence with a discourse of object agencies, occurring in the somewhat analogous field of material culture studies (Rose & Tollia-Kelly, 2012, 112). This broad perspectival shift registers an

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10 By ‘the earth’ I mean the process unity of the single globe of matter that is the changing terrestrial realm people help to constitute. I will discuss this further in Part 1.1.2.
enduring credibility for the aesthetic accounts of visuality advanced by the prominent theorists of modern fine art (such as Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Gombrich). The legacy is most clearly accepted and explained in an essay in the same volume by Pol Capdevila:

[O]ur visual capacity is developed by years of looking at our world [...]. Objects, pictures (artistic or not), and also verbal descriptions (heard and read) are the material from which we form our mental sets and enrich our visual capacities. [...] [A]rtistic styles, like languages, articulate our experience of the world, these experiences also give us other resources to attend to [...] other objects of our life.

(Capdevila, 2010, 66)

This contrary warmth, for the levels of contact and resonance that occur between perceivers and the things that they perceive, supports Dadejik and Stejskal’s anticipation of a more fragmented visual discourse which remains loosely united—through its suspicion of traditional disciplines—but without the strong consolidating thread which the endorsement of cultural determinism had formally provided. One pertinent visual culture promise of this thesis might, then, lie in its thematic engagement with interface activity itself. This might provide for a cosmological process overtone, which arguably has the potential to safeguard some faltering interdisciplinary coherence, as it also contributes to the growing richness of visual studies’ current discursive field.

The anticipated layered academic effect has something of an analogue, and an inspirational resource, in the ideas of the sociologist Bruno Latour. The very name of the actor-network-theory which he helped to develop acknowledges a performance precedence for its engagement with the manifold of agencies—near and remote—at work within encounters (Latour, 2005). Still, in this doctoral thesis, ANT’s performance credential might come through most strongly in the adoption of its methodology in the research attitude. I say this because its logic cultivates a reverence and sensitivity for engagement—as its models of systems seems to identify their events with an awe inspiring process of synergy.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} The term ‘synergy’ refers to the alchemy of things meeting, as they interact to generate effects and affects which are distinct from their original components (Lofgren & Willim, 2006, 7).
Artful Aspirations

Three aims guide the art-making methods in this research project. These are

1. To work through the ways in which art-making might engage, and be affected by, the contribution of things to material culture events;

2. To establish the art forms and/or modes which can begin to integrate creativity/process into understandings of objects—through respecting the perceived differences that lend entities their social efficacy;

3. To understand Nietzsche’s role in the achievement of each of the two former aims, underpinning an understanding of the healing aspirations of the project as a whole.

To assist in explaining these aims further, I might highlight some resistance to the setting aside of a social world that characterizes much of my research’s early engagement with things (the particular research benefits of this ‘sealed off’ approach, to material culture, will be shared through the discussion of my engagement with the notion of play, in Part Three of the thesis). This method, of exploring and appreciating material culture, might receive its most significant challenge through Martin Heidegger’s assessment of material relations in *Being and Time*—a work which is recognized as being one of the 20th century’s most influential philosophical achievements (Blattner, 2006, synopsis). Heidegger’s influential notion of Dasein describes a human being, which understands itself in terms of possibilities delimited by a social world. Dasein tends to render material things transparent as it subsumes their physicality in the task of living (Heidegger, 2008, esp. 97–98).

*Being and Time*’s philosophical bearing is arguably at work in the presumptions behind a well-subscribed understanding of the term ‘material culture’. This tends to let human worlds, and their pulling ‘horizons’, determine the question of objecthood. The book’s influence extends openly in Carl Knappett’s derivative propagation of

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12 This notion of a pulling comes after my understanding of Heidegger’s influential notion of Dasein. This describes a human being, which understands itself in terms of possibilities delimited by a perceived world. In its realization, Dasein tends to render material things transparent as it subsumes physicality in the task of living (Heidegger, 2008).
‘smooth coping’ that supposes that objects can be understood in their anonymous
ctribution to the task of human living (Knappett, 2008, 144):

|O|bjects are ready to hand […] they remain in the background. These are not objects that
hold me in their gaze; I do not ‘encounter’ them, in the sense of encountering, meeting or
bumping into a person.’

(Knappett, 2007, 135)

This disposition is foreshadowed in Knappett’s key material culture text, Thinking
Through Material Culture (Knappett, 2005, 40), wherein material things are accepted
as being authentically engaged when they are used for (and become transparent in)
some socially coherent task. The Heideggerian idea of the ‘ready to hand’ thus
amounts to something of a default position for Knappett’s pedagogy. Nevertheless,
Knappett cautions against a growing trend, in material culture studies and archaeology,
to ‘borrow substantially from phenomenology […] notably Heidegger;’ precisely
because Being and Time leaves the material (as much as the cognitive) side of events so
profoundly unarticulated (Knappett, 2005, 168).

Knappett’s caution, against a blanket acceptance of Heidegger’s phenomenology,
leads to something of a reaction against him in Fernando Santos-Granero’s The Occult
Life of Things. I believe this openly ‘antithetical’ publication breaks new ground as it
engages with native Amazonian ideas of materiality and personhood. Santos-Granero’s
discourse occurs less as a traditional anthropological exercise and more as an
opportunity to reassess the role of objects, in all social-life, by seriously entertaining
(rather than merely registering and describing) the Amerindian (or aboriginal South
American) sense of object activation; especially as it is understood to occur ‘through
intimate contact’ that recalls the same kind of attention that is involved in their
meetings with people (Santos-Granero, 2009, 14).

Whilst I have little appetite for the level of provocation that Santos-Granero seems to
enjoy throughout his argument, I accept that my own pursuit of a recognition for

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13 It was further to the publication of this volume that Carl Knappett established the Material
Culture Studies MA programme, which I completed, at the University of Exeter.
14 This phrase directly refers to the way that the insisting physicality of things seems to disappear
as they are perceived in functional terms of work to be done (Heidegger, 1996, 64–71).
15 Though I share his anxiety about the term ‘material culture’ (as it seems to predispose the
discourse, around objects, to anthropocentric accounts) the claim that phrase is ‘out of fashion’
is one example of an overstatement that seems intended to antagonise peers (see Santos-
Granero, 2009, 2).
things themselves might benefit from his disturbance of the coping model which is derived from Heidegger, as it similarly dwells on the lively potential of things themselves. Nevertheless, I can expect many postmodern scholars to be hostile to this project, as they might dismiss my ‘sealed-off’ engagement with things as some sort of material fetishism.\textsuperscript{16} Yet, I also progress with an awareness that any deep-seated resistance might come to be moderated by the growing critique of \textit{Being and Time}’s ant-ethical philosophical attitude.\textsuperscript{17}

Heidegger’s disinterested methodology has also garnered some understandable suspicion through its appeal to those political forces which have tended to favour disciplined acquiescence over the risk of any negative cultural evaluation—an issue of metaphysics that has now gained \textit{Being and Time} a significant (if secondary) critical following (see Thompson, 2005, 78–140).\textsuperscript{18} In this light, Heidegger’s methodology could be appreciated as being pro-active (and so somewhat self-dissembling) through its gifting of authority to the metaphysical suppositions of any given world.

To the extent that \textit{Being and Time}’s approach to existence understands human experience in terms of its representation (as much as any constitution) of a context, its ostensibly\textsuperscript{19} minimal level of interference (inasmuch as it does not critically engage with the way of being it describes) has come to hang a question mark over the purpose of art. This is because \textit{Being and Time} suggests that the human subject is, itself, an artistic project as its perceived objects are the creative outcomes of worlds and triggers for further social activity which itself brings about change (which describes creativity) (Michael Wheeler cited in Dreyfus, 2007b, online). Julian Stallabrass has registered this fragility of purpose less in the way that art has become an economic currency (one often held in bank vaults), and more in the way that talk about this issue (of art perceived as money) has now become ‘redundant’ (Stallabrass, 2006, 70).

Stallabrass directly questions the purpose of art in his cynical book \textit{High Art Lite}; particularly as it perceives an air of resignation (to the world) in the widespread

\textsuperscript{16} Babak Elahi associates intimate material relations with the negativity of ‘irrational’ consumerism—as its processes are suspected of speaking of the self, rather than anything material as such (Elahi, 2009, 82–83).

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Being and Time} has been particularly criticized for the way that its author studiously avoids any metaphysical entanglement with the subject’s mode of being (\textit{i.e.} Dasein), which the book pursues (see Villa, 1996, 252–257).

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Being and Time} does apprehend being as a way through a fundamentally mysterious earth. In this sense, I accept that it denies that any human power structure can lay claim on any absolute.

\textsuperscript{19} I use the term ‘ostensibly’ to recognize that Heidegger’s uncritical engagement with ‘the subject’ assisted the creation of a politically ineffective brand of philosophy in Nazi Germany (Young, 1998, 93).
adoption (by contemporary artists based in Britain) of a ‘what you see is what you get’ attitude (Stallabrass, 2001, 35). He distinguishes this disposition from the irony of the seemingly similar work of predecessors, such as Andy Warhol. Drawing on the example of Tracey Emin’s art, which includes an unmade bed, he notes that some of the output is problematically identical with the artist’s own ‘subjectivity and its expression’ (Stallabrass, 2001, 43). Emin’s work is contrasted with the emptiness of Gary Hume’s ‘dry’ paintings; Stallabrass understands that the latter works tend to become opportunities for much of the same—albeit as it might be anticipated to occur on the side of such art’s viewers (Stallabrass, 2001, 35).

If contemporary artists continue to use familiar objects as art, I would suggest that a level of anxiety (about art’s uncertain purpose) is sustaining some fresh interest in the question of materiality—as this accepts an apparent level of willingness to explore intimate engagements with objects and materials in the context of both social research and art (see Zahavi, 2003, esp. 109–110; Hezekiah, 2010). I sensed that a fresh interest in the matter of things themselves was detectable in the British Art Show’s last review, in 2011. Works by artists such as Varda Caivano and Luke Fowler represented the ‘smooth’ idea of material culture only in terms of the models that it refuses: Caivano using (untitled) painted images to allow viewers to revisit—as much as simply accept—the visceral experience of her artwork’s own production process, whilst Luke Fowler’s Flutter Screen (2010) used the sound of a film projector, conspicuous lighting, and air blown by pedestal fans, to revisit cinema’s ‘big screen’ in terms of the physicality subsumed in its ‘illusion’.

Works such as the ones identified above seem ambivalent about the supposed authority of human worlds, preferring instead to visit lived life as an aggregate and, possibly, an assemblage—even as their productions help to compose an overarching world of art. A further goal, then, is to contribute to (as I might benefit from) the revival, for the particular issue of things themselves, which this contemporary art mood seems to anticipate. I will pursue this by attempting to apprehend the material condition of existence as it might be recognized through a notion of presence. This

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20 I worked as a tour guide and an invigilator at the Plymouth leg of The British Art Show 7 in 2011.
21 This tendency appeared to prompt the surprise of Art Monthly’s Zoë Sherman as her review registered the show’s ‘disinterest’ in social engagement (at the level of practice) and the related efficacy of networks (Sherman, 2010, 27).
22 This will be fully introduced in my opening to Part One.
extends to my relationship with Nietzsche’s writing, particularly as its text seems to heighten a sense of my own agency being at work in the process of perception.

Beyond Symmetry

Material culture’s tentative take-up of Nietzsche’s philosophical progeny—such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and (arguably) Bruno Latour (as evident in Hezekiah, 2010; Tilley, 2004; Kien, 2009)—ensures that some of his ideas already bear within a nascent ‘carnal’ turn. The latter’s belief that things themselves can be epistemologically engaged seems to be one response to the downgrading of history described in section iv, and Chris Whitmore has conceived it in terms of six defining defaults:

- **It begins with mixtures, rather than bifurcations.**
- **It assumes that a variety of human and non-human agencies are always acting.**
- **It accepts that there is more to understanding than ‘meaning’.**
- **It accepts that changes arise from fluctuations in relations.**
- **It does not engage with the past as an event that is exclusively past.**
- **It affirms that humanity begins with things** (Whitmore cited in Johnson, 2010, 226).

This fresh engagement with things makes seemingly Nietzschean appeals to some human/non-human ‘symmetry’—as this includes conceiving the carnal as physicality per se. However its subject-object agnosticism stops short of an overcoming of the binary that is understood to represent a problem. I say this because it still maintains a stubborn tendency to significantly differentiate the orienting human body from ‘non-human agencies’. This explains and justifies something of Tim Ingold’s anxiety (as registered in section vi of this preliminary) about the epistemological insistence of duality. I might illuminate this modern legacy further by invoking the ideas of Christopher Tilley:
The relationship of a subject and his or her body is an inner one: I have a body and that is my consciousness. Such a perspective creates a significant break with a mechanistic approach to the body in which it is a mere thing which belongs to no-one, only being individualized by the mind. The lived body, the body with a mind, is for every person a particular way of inhabiting the world, of being present in it, sensing it. [...] The lived body allows us to know what space, place and landscape are because it is the author of them all. From the horizon we learn what is near, what is far, that which is above, that which is below, etc., the horizon line: the limits of our vision.

(Tilley, 2004, 3)

Whilst I endorse Tilley’s affirmation of the body as our key orienting reference for all activities, I might suggest that its positioning as the ‘author’ of all things, rests too easily with human being. In doing so, it concedes an anthropocentric attitude that compromises—or perhaps defines the limits of—the symmetry introduced above, just as it places its subsequent claim on transcending ‘traditional distinctions between subject and object’ into the territory of hyperbole (Tilley, 2004, 3). Nevertheless, Tilley’s exercise does (to my way of thinking) help to demarcate the next challenge for material culture studies, just as its failure—to completely overcome a familiar dualism—registers the issue of the ego (i.e. an unconsciously perceived primacy of the subjective ‘I’, in a given individual) as an overriding concern.

The psychologist and philosopher, Raymond Barglow, has similarly identified this as a significantly outstanding epistemological, and cultural, issue, as he recognizes that a wide acceptance of the human subject’s non-existence remains the unrealized project of a historical process, of deconstruction. This began with Copernicus’ discovery that the earth is not the centre of the universe—as that itself anticipated both Darwin’s discovery that we are merely the latest beings in an evolutionary process, and Freud’s recognition ‘that we are not even masters in our own house’ (Barglow, 1997, 82). Ingold seems to restate this same point as his book, The Perception of the Environment, suggests that the understanding of mind, as some origin of experience (rather than an effect of some bigger happening), remains the significant obstacle in the study of material culture (Ingold, 2007, 170–171).

The challenge, of overcoming the ego demands some holistic re-conceiving of the body. The resistance to this change might be registered in a deep seated Western discomfort with any notion that might align human activity with the bearing of ‘lifeless’ and fleeting ephemera. This doctoral thesis uses Nietzsche’s writing, and his notion of
‘will to power’ (to be introduced, in more detail, in Part One), as a source for attempting to achieve just this.

ix )

**Ghostly Guidance**

What is philosophically important, for this research, is that as Nietzsche turns his attention to longstanding philosophical problems (such as ‘What sort of world do we live in?’ ‘How should we live in it?’ ‘What is the essence of life?’ and ‘On what basis can we presume to know these things?’), he invokes a principle which means that the questions are answered within a holistic context of becoming. This recovers ‘mere’ matter from its widely perceived inertia, just as readily as it mutes any claim on the special significance of human being. Yet, if this PhD project amounts to a Nietzschean re-acquaintance with the inherent creativity of material relations, then it nevertheless aspires to be suggestive of—and adequate to—new ways in which the world could work. This progression expands the interdisciplinary ambition of the thesis by pushing its agenda beyond a simple revisiting of the former’s ideas, towards the realm of philosophy itself: territory which I understand to be indistinct from my creative practice, inasmuch as it engages with one’s ‘own’ perceptual activity, in terms of the way that it shapes, and subsequently becomes shaped by, the things that it encounters.²³

It is in its philosophical bias that I consider this endeavour’s creativity to extend to the research method, as it primarily re-engages with my sense of self in terms of a changing dynamism. In its process, this approach recognizes Joanne Faulkner’s fresh angle on Nietzsche, as it frames the art of reading his works in terms of some affecting, but self-realizing, encounter with his ghost:

More than most philosophers, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche commands a following of readers who attempt, each in his or her own manner, to perpetuate his legacy. Many of these thinkers […] also attempting to actualize ‘the event’ his writings only envisage.

(Faulkner, 2010, 1)

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²³ This definition is a holistic revision of Don Cuppitt’s description of philosophy, which has it as ‘trying to become aware of how one’s own thinking […] shapes the things you’re thinking about’ (Edmonds and Warburton, 2010, online).
Faulkner’s book, Dead Letters to Nietzsche, or the Necromantic Art of Reading Philosophy, revisits the said philosopher in terms of his effective ‘purchase’. This refers to the way that his writing achieves more than an exchange of textual information (Faulkner, 2010, 2). From my experience, Nietzsche’s writing actually seems responsive to the reader’s eye and affords a glimpse of a philosopher who seems committed to the former’s cause. Nevertheless, if the feeling of collaboration seems to conjure up Nietzsche’s spirit it perhaps also provides for his project of instituting a process of perceptual change in the reader. I would suggest that my strategy of reading Nietzsche, as an affecting encounter, taps directly into this philosophical advantage. Nietzsche appears to wilfully point to the exploited process in his book Thus Spake Zarathustra (1997). A chapter entitled ‘Reading and Writing’ frames the issue of interpretation in terms of a sacrament’s turning (of a private life-force) out—towards the instability of its display to another.

Of all that is written, I love only what a person hath written with his blood. Write with blood, and thou wilt find that blood is spirit.

It is no easy task to understand unfamiliar blood; I hate the reading idlers.

He who knoweth the reader, doth nothing more for the reader.

(Nietzsche, 1997, 36)

This seems to acknowledge that the person who picks up the book, Zarathustra, and reads it will not be the person who puts it down when it is finished. Indeed, I feel that Zarathustra’s original subtitle, ‘A Book For All and None’, refers to this process (Santaniello, 2005, 1). Faulkner seems to advocate a similar understanding through an appeal to Georges Bataille’s own lyrical account of reading Zarathustra:

In the helter-skelter of this book, I didn’t develop my views as theory. In fact, I even believe that efforts of that kind are tainted with ponderousness. Nietzsche wrote ‘with his blood,’ and criticizing or, better, experiencing him means pouring out one’s [own] lifeblood.

(Bataille cited in Faulkner, 2010, 105)

This frames the literary process, of reading Nietzsche, in terms of a mutually transformative encounter (between its two constitutive individuals) and hints at a key literary (and performance) method, which sustains the methodology of the thesis.
The Literary Method

In his book, *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor writes that the challenge of making a difference, to any perception, does not take its protagonists out of an ‘original’ situation of identity-formation:

> [T]he drive to original vision will be hampered, will ultimately be lost in inner confusion, unless it can be placed in some way in relation to the language and vision of others.
>
> [...] I have to meet [...] [their] challenge: Do I know what I’m saying? Do I really grasp what I’m talking about? And this challenge I can only meet by confronting my thought and language with the thought and reactions of others.

(Taylor, 2006, 37)

This relational structure seems to exemplify the inherent sociability of process perspectives as it describes change in terms of the affecting presentation of ‘self-image’. If this is formed through some comparative desire to ‘appear in a good light’ to those we might be close to, or admire (Taylor, 2006, 33), then its essential temporality also challenges a Western notion that we always, already, have ourselves. As Taylor advances this relational model, as an inevitability of any transformation, he also supposes that it concedes the failure of personal identity, and so risks being framed—in Western(ized) societies—in terms of some vital weakness, or lack. Nevertheless, it is just such activity that is embraced in my method, as it pursues the research aims through realizing the performative potential of Nietzsche’s writing: a creative achievement, which might be identified with the distinctive style(s) that support, and are in some sense indistinguishable from, his message:

Nietzsche’s stylistic pluralism [...] is his solution to the problem involved in presenting positive views that do not, simply by virtue of being positive, fall back into dogmatism. It is his means of reminding his readers that what they are reading is always Nietzsche’s own interpretation of life and the world. His many styles make it impossible to get used to his presence and, as we do with many of the things we take for granted, to forget it. They therefore show that his positions are expressions of one particular point of view besides which there might be many others. They show his perspectivism without saying anything about it [...].

(Nehemas, 1985, 40)
As Alexander Nehemas highlights, Nietzsche seems to use style to actualize something of what he always advocates. This is to say that his philosophy tends to both represent and realize ‘truth’ as a terse site of struggle, to be felt—rather than something that is, or could be, knowable as such:

‘Truth’ is [...] not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather a will to overcome that has in itself no end [...].

Man projects his drive to truth, his ‘goal’ in a certain sense, outside himself as a world that has being, as a metaphysical world, as a ‘thing-in-itself,’ as a world already in existence. His needs as creator invent the world upon which he works, anticipate it; this anticipation (this “belief” in truth) is his support.

(Nietzsche, 1968, 298–299)

Nietzsche’s strategy arguably finds its most effective expression through his use of aphorisms. These produce an effective tempo for his strident progressions: a process that Zarathustra identifies with the momentum and oversight of an unlikely mountain pass which goes ‘from peak to peak’ (Nietzsche, 1997, 36). This path encourages the ready adoption of differing viewpoints; its thumping impact also maintains my method, as it typically stimulates a contested subjectivity for the benefit of its own overcoming.

I might share something of what my literary method actualizes through an invocation of aphorism 73 of Nietzsche’s Gay Science:

A man who held a newborn child in his hands approached a holy man. ‘What shall I do with this child?’ he asked; ‘it is wretched, misshapen, and does not have life enough to die.’ ‘Kill it!’ shouted the holy man with a terrible voice; ‘and then hold it in your arms for three days and three nights to create a memory for yourself: never again will you beget a child this way when it is not time for you to beget.’

(Nietzsche, 1974, 129)

The level of punchy provocation, here, might be understood to resist any easy immersion into, or assimilation of, its text. From my experience, it rather effects a reaction that effectively makes both the reader and Nietzsche present to each other. Nevertheless, the recognition of the philosophical context affords some understanding on the side of each: Nietzsche credits that the aphorism will not simply be taken at its
word, whilst the reader might extend a generosity, which usefully brings their own subjectivity to the work—as an object of interest.

In the cited instance, above, the strategy is intense because the ‘child’ identified for execution is arguably the interpreting individual (i.e. the reader) who is expected to spring to its defence. Nietzsche’s antagonism recognizes that the latter can be readily made present, for the sake of its own change, through some irritation of the ego. This teases out the subject as it begins to determine the limits that contain its defining ideas and opinions.

The challenging scenario, which Nietzsche’s writing encourages, has compelling parallels with a process of philosophical hermeneutics illuminated by Nicholas Davey in his book *Unquiet Understanding*. Whilst this volume questions the ethics of Nietzsche’s own level of excluding (which is evident in a continual suspicion of ‘the masses’ and ideas which he identifies with them), he is nevertheless evoked in Davey’s illuminations of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s ethical method of engaging with philosophy, as it identifies the challenge of its perspectival developments with a creation of difference that must occur before any subjective change can be cognitively appreciated. As Davey notes, it is this process (as it is distinguishable from the correlates of assimilation and immersion, which efface difference) that ‘preserves the reality of alternative possibilities that are not our own’—as it also affords a subject some critical reflection upon their own becoming (Davey, 2006, 8).

xi )

**The Structure of the Thesis**

The forthcoming writing is split into six parts which contain references to two (numbered) DVDs, mounted on the inside of the back cover. The latter contain videos which will share the research practice with examiners/readers. As the writing and the movies complement the understanding of each other, they should be viewed one at a time and in some accordance with the prompts and referrals which occur in the text. I might underscore that these works are not expected to sustain the thesis independently, however they are not simply research documents—they are also a means of sharing the affecting art-led experiences which changed my own perception. Given this, I consider them to be representations of my art-making processes.

An argument, for the deployment of art’s practices, commences through the first part’s engagement with the issue of difference (difference, and its recognition, being
understood as the precept for meeting material things themselves). This comes through a body-led engagement, which will be shown to afford some access to the involving economy of Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’. Thereafter, the part will focus attention on the implicated thing-side of affects. This begins to advocate an anthropomorphic approach to objects that is generally suspected by the prevalent Western mind-set (which places an ontological chasm between people and matter).

At the conclusion of this first part of the thesis I hope to have communicated the following:

- A sense of difference as a condition of, rather than a challenge to, oneness.
- The circumstances of a shift of perceptual emphasis—from objects, onto interfaces and processes.
- A key porosity in knowledge-praxis and body-matter relations.

Part Two progresses the thesis through exploring the revitalizing implications of Part One’s engagement with interfaces. In so doing, it comes to terms with the transformative productivity of objects. If this implicates underexplored worlds of stuff and things ‘acting-out’, then it also serves the trajectory of the thesis by refusing the assumed primacy of human contexts in the determination of material culture engagements. In terms of the trajectory, then, the second part might be understood to forward the thesis in three key ways:

- By reconfiguring my art practice as an encounter with the animated earth.
- By recovering some (qualified) legitimacy for the anthropomorphism that recognizes this agency.
- By fore-grounding the process-earth as an exoteric creative experience.

Part Three adopts a different tone: it pauses the practice-as-research for an engagement with shamanism, which considers it as an artful precedent for my integrating project. Part 3.1 sketches a general outline of the shaman’s social role; as this exposition comes to recognize a modern correlate in the performances of some of early cinema’s

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24 When I use the term ‘stuff’ I am referring to materials such as air and water, which cannot be numbered.
slapstick clowns, it anticipates Part 3.2’s particular engagement with Buster Keaton. In its entirety, the part consolidates the interdisciplinary origin of the project, as it revisits some traditional performance territory in terms of its implications, and usefulness, for material culture studies. Moreover, the part recognizes my own new perspectives as it sees me reconceiving some slapstick footage as a challenge to a prevalent vision of material things as ‘dead’, or ‘inert’. This helps me to reframe (and reform) my own practice, as a shamanic project, and also anticipates a switch of research emphasis—onto the task of changing the outlooks of other subjects. Part Four accepts this fresh direction, and its slapstick influence, as its return to practice-as-research sees me seeking a mode of vision that might return humanity to the project without compromising the holistic agenda. In brief, then, Parts Three and Four will broadly work to

- **Shift attention onto the task of affecting others.**
- **Rearticulate my own practice as shamanic, for its refinement as such.**
- **Develop an affecting strategy/method for propagating a process appreciation of material culture, within an anthropocentric milieu.**

Part Five registers the emergence of a new practice, as it re-engages with a human world. In its detail it sees me testing the capacity of a strategy to operate on the behalf of process in anthropocentric environments. This feeds into the challenge of a sixth and final part, which documents the production of an experiment—one that was expected to embody the thesis as it supposed that objects, themselves, could reproduce the mind-altering effects of philosophy. In its presentation, the documentation of Part Six recalls something of the experiment’s own assembly and execution, through its deployment of Lawrence Halprin’s ‘RSVP’ model. This is conventionally used in performance workshops as a reference for assisting the optimization of performance practices. But the RSVP acronym’s conceptual breakdown, of theatrical presence, will also be shown to provide an appropriate structure for simply describing the content and interplays of all events.

Together, then, Parts Five and Six see me working
• To establish the continuity of all experience by shifting the spatial emphasis of objects away from entities towards the interpreted traffic—or bridge—between them.

• To thematize, and afford access to, material culture as an actively generative and affecting event.

• To return human beings to the integrating ambition, in terms of the former.

• To consolidate the research for, and through, an appropriate process-led intervention into the context of the academy.
Part One
Overview

This opening part will discuss how I attempted to establish the foundations of a research methodology that might address the problem of a prevalent anthropocentricity as well as material culture’s missing—at least inasmuch as it is occluded by the former outlook—‘thing-side’.¹ This turn of phrase usefully recognizes that any subjective perspective is the effect of an event which involves the matter of things, even as that matter might not be directly accessible in the subject’s experience. The groundwork registered in this part of the thesis is split in accordance with the two-fold nature of the task. Yet I must stress that, despite the differing emphasis which supports the part’s division (the first chapter focusing upon a human experience, whilst the second privileges its thing-side), the research remains essentially connected—through an overarching aim to access the indivisible oneness of the shared material culture events which humans and non-humans, together, unfold.

The first half of this part represents the research as it restaged a painted image in an effort to critically grasp the perception that made its rendering process possible. Having also established the wide and enduring relevance of this artistic outlook, it then gives way to the second half’s engagement with a process of actually changing the apprehended subjectivity (through some engagement with my own outlook, as it is understood to be usefully representative of its endurance), to make it sensitive to the thing-side of experience. This sensibility is developed through a performance of restaging an event for video; a process which will be shared in its creation of an affecting visual relationship—between the materiality of the latter’s media, and the matter of its recorded event.

The first chapter will use a fine art image—namely Caspar David Friedrich’s 1818 painting, The Wanderer above a Sea of Mist—² as a tool for revisiting the event of its generative, artistic, production process. The recognition of art as a subjective record will be fore-grounded together with a restaging’s pivotal narrowing of a significant historical time-span (between Friedrich’s creative activity and my own perception). Given this, the method documented in the first chapter (i.e. Part 1.1) might be

¹ The term is derived (by Romand Coles) from Jane Bennett’s notion of ‘thing-power’ (Coles in Bennett, 2010, back-matter). This similarly recognizes that objects always have some sway on the outcome of subjective engagements (Bennett, 2010, xvi).
² Theodore Ziolkowski supposes that The Wanderer has assisted the formation of the Western subject as he credits it with ‘indelibly’ fixing ‘the beauty of nature, the quiet attractions of home, and the vaguely ominous lure of distant lands’ in the popular imagination (Ziolkowski, 1990, 3).
understood to register my creative practice as it yielded to something of the archaeological context of my MA programme in material culture studies which preceded this doctoral project.

The influential bearing of my master’s curriculum will also be evident through the logic of the first chapter’s method—as it reverses a familiar making process (through a task that starts, rather than ends, with an artefact) for the recovery of its underpinning perception. Inasmuch as this procedure begins with a product, to pursue a means of its manufacture, the activity betrays the particular influence of the experimental archaeology described in section iv of my introduction. To be exact, much as experimental archaeology uses made artefacts as references (to reverse engineer the material culture of their own industry) so the research—in Part 1.1—will see me using an art-historical object to revisit a significant perceptual event behind its production.

However, given that the developments of the first chapter conspicuously return a prevalent way of seeing to me, one that is understood only to be ‘lost’ to a contemporary vision through its omnipresence (rather than its absence), it will ultimately be shown to be more in keeping with the aims of genealogy. I say this because its approach tends to keep questions relating to the present to the fore (as distinct an historical archaeological mind-set, which tends to concern itself with the past even as its search for origins accepts a link with the present). Moreover, as its process explicitly involves doing the very activity of objective observation that it is pursuing, the documentation will also explain my preference for the term ‘experiential’ as an appropriate rejoinder to the archaeological influence. It is in this experiential sense that the research attempts to enfold the practice of art and material culture studies together—defying any idea of a parallel discourse, as it executes an excavation in the same moment that its performance unfolds.

As each of the two chapters shares a process of reproduction, the whole part which they constitute will begin to sketch the outline of a restaging method that may integrate art-making and the study of material culture through performance. Given the overlap with philosophy, their mood and content might support and gain some further import from David Krasner and David Z. Saltz, in their recognition of some continuity between

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3 I am reminded, here, of the saying that fish are the last to see water.
4 I might qualify this by noting that my own process might well recover a critical capacity (i.e. an awareness of one’s own mind), which was once ‘there’ in human perceptions. This archaeological aspect might be registered in my acknowledgement of Descartes in section 1.1.3 of the first chapter. However, an explicit engagement with the said ‘capacity’ is beyond the scope this thesis—though its implicit promise of an experiential archaeology (of the Western subject) has been noted.
the purpose of theatre and the process of philosophy. Their introduction to the edited volume, Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theatre, Performance, and Philosophy, supposes that theatre’s generation of a stage, for the observation of events, procures its further involvement with philosophy because the latter’s thoughtful illuminations similarly aim to ‘shed light’ on action. However, whilst this part of the thesis begins to realize something of the interdisciplinary promise supposed, it might also disturb the status of any of the objects illuminated ‘on stage’, as it adopts an overview which begins to accept the vital (i.e. life, or process, promoting) primacy of the activity between any production and its perceivers. To expand, the identified disturbance might come because the interest in interplay shifts the research focus onto the space (of interaction) in front of objects. This adds an undermining nuance to the interdisciplinary vision of Krasner and Saltz because their proposal is based on a proclivity—one which the pair understand to be shared by performance and philosophy—to help people see ‘the realities that underlie surface appearances’ (Krasner and Saltz, 2009, 3 [emphasis mine]).

Having drawn attention to a level of conflict with Krasner and Saltz, I must add the ‘undermining nuance’—which I have recognized through my own interdisciplinary experience—could not be said to be entirely unanticipated: their edited collection includes a key contribution, by Martin Puchner, which acknowledges that Nietzsche’s interest in masks (and this interest will be invoked in section 1.1.3 of the first chapter) provides a notable precedent for a meeting of performance and philosophy, even as it works to deflect attention away from the pursuit of anything substantial behind appearances (Puchner, 2009, 42–43).

I would suggest that the discursive significance of interactions can be detected in a contemporary turn in performance studies, which increasingly understands ostensibly independent things in terms of the involvements of scenarios. Traditionally, the term scenario has referred to the overarching plot of a play, but a current usage seems to invoke the issue of becoming, as it refers to things in their coming about through the activity of others. Indeed, as Diana Taylor acknowledges the influence of Roland Barthes in her determination of the notion of scenarios—in her book The Archive and

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5 Given this, it could be said that their introduction is intended to be strategic—rather than representative of their perspective. This is to say that it might work with (and so betray) the anticipated outlook of a reader to sustain his or her interest—for the purpose of its challenge to the notion that things might have a substantial (as opposed to a relational) essence.
the Repertoire—she arguably concedes the influence of Nietzsche in contemporary performance studies.\(^6\)

Scenario, [...] like performance, means never for the first time. Like Barthes’s mythical speech, it consists of ‘material which has already been worked on’ [...]. Its portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats.

(Taylor, 2003, 28)

As this dialogical understanding of the term ‘scenario’ emphasizes that the apparent qualities of one being occur in accordance with the impacts of former encounters, it might be understood to have a correlate in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s appreciation of ‘presence’. The latter frames things in terms of the imminently unfolding, and dialogical, process of one body encountering something other than itself:

What is ‘present’ to us (very much in the sense of the Latin form prae-esse) is in front of us, in reach and tangible for our bodies [...]. If pro-ducere means, literally, ‘to bring forth,’ ‘to pull forth,’ then the phrase ‘production of presence’ would emphasize that the effect of tangibility [...] is also an effect in constant movement [...].

(Gumbrecht, 2004, 17)

But if the invocation of scenarios affirms the relational conditions of ostensibly independent objects, then this part will also show how a performance process of restaging can tease out some of those conditional particulars, for some contemporary reappraisal and redress.

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\(^6\) Gary Shapiro details the profound influence of Nietzsche upon Barthes in his essay ‘To Philosophize is to Learn how to Die’ (Shapiro, 1989, 3–31). However, I believe Nietzsche’s influence to be layered in Taylor’s idea of the scenario because it seems to recall (through its somewhat paradoxical invocation of contingency and fate) his particular vision of tragedy; I will visit and explain this latter perspective, myself, in Part Three of this thesis.
1.1

In Front of Meaning

1.1.1

Disturbing Images

The onset of this PhD coincided with an invitation to contribute a chapter to the book *Morrissey: Fandom Representations and Identities* (Devereux et al., 2011). My addition, “Because I’ve only got Two Hands”: Western Art Undercurrents in the Poses and Gestures of Morrissey’, engaged with the contemporary pop icon (Morrissey) in terms of his communicative body. One emotive scenario involved Morrissey’s apparent recollection of the central figure in Caspar David Friedrich’s 1818 painting of *The Wanderer above a Sea of Mist*. With the intention of illustrating the related writing (whilst negotiating some anxieties I had about the complications of copyright law) I began sketching my own drawings of *The Wanderer* (one of which is presented in Figure 1.1).

*Figure 1.1*
In the process of making my copies, I became distracted by a thought that my objective—to be faithful to the proportions and perspectives of the original—recognized something of Friedrich’s own neoclassical technique and so, perhaps, something of his Enlightened subjectivity. Moreover, as I expected that my striving for some formal likeness would be appreciated as a virtue by the book’s anticipated readers, I realized that I was accepting the endurance of the recognized way of seeing in contemporary perspectives (as these included my own way of seeing).

A similar supposition of a prevailing subjectivity—which has survived the significant ideological changes that have occurred in the western world, since the Enlightenment— informed Gerhard Richter’s artistic revisiting of Friedrich’s realism in the 1970s:

A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted: specific ideologies, for example. Beyond that, if it is ‘good,’ it concerns us—transcending ideology—as art that we ostentatiously defend (preview, show, make). Therefore, ‘today,’ we can paint as Caspar David Friedrich did.

(Richter cited in Elger, 2009, 174)

Today, Friedrich’s paintings are typically presented as art historical objects (The Wanderer is currently housed in the Hamburger Kunsthalle museum, Germany). This might mean that The Wanderer’s appeal to the principle of reality is accepted through a chronological and stylistic association with the genre of realism (Reill & Wilson, 2004, 217). However, the historical circumstance might deter contemporary viewers from entertaining (or playing along with) its magical aspiration (i.e. the aim to make the matter of the landscape present—an intention which might be now recognized through

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7 The romantic perspective—which Friedrich also represents—was, on one level, a reaction against the mechanical worldview propagated through the ideas of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless (and this is a point I will begin to support through the forthcoming explication of Friedrich’s realist method), the former movement seemed to accept the defining subject-object format that determined the Enlightened gaze. This might be registered in Albert Boime’s report that whilst Friedrich was student in Copenhagen, and after two years of copying old masters, he began pursuing a career as a topographical draughtsman—producing ‘postcardlike’ views for tourists and travel books (Boime, 1990, 514).

8 Realist painters supposed that they could make representations that were free of any subjective interpretation. In this sense, they arguably anticipated a viewer’s own placement of themselves into its scene—as they aimed to make their creative activity (and so the paint of the painting) magically disappear in any perception of their work; Aidan Day affirms a link with romantic art, as he argues that the protagonists of the latter movement (whilst difficult to unify) often aimed to create representations that allowed audiences to ‘contemplate […] a purely natural object’ unencumbered by ‘corrupting’ traces of human artifice (Day, 1998, 41).
any disappearance of the paint in the process of its picture’s viewing) beyond the level of the critique pursued by Richter.9

My own procedure of copying Friedrich’s picture pushed my relationship with its realism beyond a tacit acceptance of its art-historical claims upon the notion of the real. On reflection, I believe this was assisted by the duration of the drawing process as it added a temporal dimension (that I associated with real experience) to my viewing, which was not apparent in the simple perception of The Wanderer’s image. This afforded a contrast (between the instantaneous image and its newly durational ‘happening’) which allowed me to reflect upon, and overcome, my level of daily complicity with its broad aim—to make the creative ‘hand’, behind an image, vanish in the process of its viewing.

To expand on the research impact of this: as I drew the picture, I understood that I was reproducing, and reiterating, Friedrich’s unfolding gaze as I copied the image as it was ‘really’ before me.10 Thereafter, I had a sense that I was consciously returning the reality principle back to the historical object that had helped to shape my own, Western, subjectivity.11 This acceptance (of the reality of an image) would invite a further process of testing, which tried to re-establish the conditions of reality in the face of the ensuing level of disorientation. By consciously extending the reality principle to something formerly understood as a ‘mere’ representation, I actually challenged the idea of reality per se (as this demanded some alternative idea of illusion, to withstand as a meaningful concept); my discomfort with this drove the research onwards.

1.1.2

Recovering Affects

If my drawing afforded some dwelling on Friedrich’s painted landscape, the questions—posed by its newly fore-grounded claim on reality—encouraged some comparisons with the vistas I was experiencing at around the same time whilst undertaking regular runs through the terrain of South Dartmoor. Jaunts around Devon’s tors, whilst lonely, were offering elevated views of towering rocks, isolated trees, and

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9 This acknowledges Friedrich’s realist aspiration in terms of a contemporary irony—i.e. the immersion, Friedrich invites, constitutes a contemporary way of seeing, even as it is typically questioned within the frame of a painting.

10 I accept that this is a superficial intention in Friedrich’s painting—nevertheless the association seems to be expected even if it is exploited for a more mystical, romantic, agenda.

11 Jean Baudrillard further explores the relationship between the process of ‘disillusion’ (which conceals any sense of artifice from onlookers) and art in his essay ‘Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality’ (Baudrillard, 1997).
blankets of fog, which were analogous with my visions of The Wanderer’s environment. But the level of formal similarity also seemed to emphasize the difference in the feeling of the comparable views: the environmentally embedded experience being more kinaesthetically tactile (for reasons which will be outlined below) than the viewing of Friedrich’s picture. The latter view became decisive, once more, because it recovered at least something of me (i.e. my own felt sensation of seeing) from a looming threat of insignificance. This is to say that its affirmation of my own body relieved a worrying sense of personal peril which had been posed by the recognition of a subjective replication (which diminished my ‘specialness’), and the related speculation on the landscape’s formal integrity—which supposed that its scene was indifferent to my presence. I might suggest, then, that I was experiencing a kind of kinaesthetic empathy with the landscape, wherein its perception reassured me of my own importance as it reminded me of my own generative activity. 

The concurrent reading of Nietzsche (Thus Spake Zarathustra accompanied me on my walks) helped me to identify sensations, and the perceptual limits prescribed by my anxieties with the matter of objects. As such, things which were formerly silent and inert began to stir in a fashion that held the promise of the earthly communion advocated in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra—particularly as the protagonist supposed that, as all thought and sensation was doing the earth, the human body would be able to speak ‘uprightly’ and so philosophically of its (the earth’s) meaning (Nietzsche, 1997, 28–29).

At first, orienting reality about my body’s feelings made The Wanderer seem strange as its representation appeared to jar with the referential sensation of trying to see similar vistas on the moor. But I began recovering the rift when I came to identify the apparent incongruence with the way that Friedrich’s image readily gave up its foreground, background, and its peripheries, in a single uniform sharp focus. I found that my stubborn attempts at some environmentally involved equivalent of Friedrich’s imagery created only vague correspondences; the effort also produced a dull muscular

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12 Mark Paterson has also recognized the self-affirming propensity, of this tactile kind of seeing, in his book The Senses of Touch (see Paterson, 2007, esp.31).
13 This notion of doing the earth can be understood in its opposition to an idea of being a person living upon the earth; I say this because the former accepts that our emergence from—what is commonly, if enigmatically, called—a ‘primordial soup’ might imply that our exercised agencies (including our powers of observation) occur in accordance with the earth’s process of change; so helping to make the earth both what it is (arguably a network of affecting relations) and what it will formally become.
14 This ‘recovering’ refers to a superficial ‘papering-over’ of a mind-body cleft. This anticipated the deeper healing that would occur through the duration of the research.
pain in my eyes. Some scientific reading informed me of the reasons for this. In summary, it supposed that my ‘equivalent’ was actually a mental composite of a multiple images. These were produced by my eye’s rapid creation of similar but distinct views, which differed as they variously privileged a focus on foreground, background, and fringe details (Croucher, 2007, 1.32–1.33). As these made differing demands on the eye’s camera, so its various muscles experienced an unfamiliar and strenuous ‘workout’.

On reflection, I can now see that as this ‘groping’ provided for a feeling, so it began to ground my research in a physical dimension. This belonged to the matter of the earth even as it deepened my conceptual dilemma. In this sense, my process had begun to affect a therapy known as body ‘focusing’ as it eased a subjective tension by raising some awareness of a responsive ecological ‘me’, which was constituting a changing physical environment that contained my Western perspective (so shrinking its importance). In his book called Focusing—which outlines the body-led therapy method—Eugene Gendlin echoes Zarathustra as he highlights an overlap, between the expressing human body and the questions of philosophy:

> Whenever you hear phrases like ‘it must be,’ turn them off. You are only doing what most people do throughout their lives: trying to tell yourself what is wrong. Remember the importance of an ‘asking’ rather than a ‘telling’ internal attitude. Tell yourself nothing. Ask, wait, and let your body reply.

(Gendlin, 2003, 109).

I speculated that Friedrich’s uniformly sharp treatment, of all details, verified the effective presence of a supposedly influential fine art, and philosophical, paradigm—with which I had become familiar during the art history programme for my first degree, namely Leon Alberti’s seeing model (c.1435). This celebrates a seeing that occurs when a flat veil or screen comes between an observer and their viewed things (Alberti, 1991, 67). The Wanderer’s apparent affirmation, of this vision, seemed to be reiterated by the centric immobility of its solitary figure which seems to revisit the stasis of the viewer in Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola’s illustration of what Alberti was supposing. Figure 1.2 is my own copy of this picture; it omits some of da Vignola’s geometrical details to provide clear access to the way of seeing Alberti describes—as it essentially supposes the existence of a transparent visual plane between a subject and his or her object.
In its operation, as a window, Alberti’s screen apparently provides for a ground that invites the rendering of the scenery that lies behind it (Friedberg, 2009, 26–48). Nevertheless, and as Giacomo’s diagram suggests, a pursuit of several objects would mean that the window is effectively scanned, a bit a time, so the things taken in by its frame can be observed in their detailed particularity. As such, their visual apprehension is uncompromised by the focal challenges presented by their appearance in an entirety, which—in the case of The Wanderer’s landscape—includes a significant depth of field.

Given the consistency in detail, throughout the landscape’s depth-of-field, it seemed clear to me that Friedrich’s preparations for The Wanderer had involved the picking out of independent features in a landscape. I understood that these independent visions were then rendered (with an according detail and finesse) to complete the whole. Given this, I could associate the new jarring I experienced, before Friedrich’s image, with the unlikely vista of a single flat image positioned somewhere only just in front of its central figure. The un-likeness was made apparent by a kinaesthetic contrast afforded by two different but comparable views: one of a flattened representation, the other rooted in the rolling environment of Dartmoor.

Some reassurance that my recognition might provide for an insight, into a prevalent (as much as any personal) oblivion,\(^{15}\) came through the work of Kristoffer Zetterstrand: an artist who specializes in representations of virtual realities, which make a subject’s

\(^{15}\) This notion of oblivion refers to Heidegger’s identification of a subjective state that does not have a consciousness for that which is lost in its self-interested perception of objects (see Heidegger, 1977, 128–129).
way of seeing visible to its own gaze. One painting, *Wanderer* (2008) (see Figure 1.3), aimed to make the ‘illusion’ of Friedrich’s painting apparent through a revelation of its own self-dissembling structure (Zetterstrand, 2010, online).

*Figure 1.3: Reproduced from<br>*<http://zetterstrand.com/work/2008.php#pictures/2008/wanderer.jpg>.

The encounter with Zetterstrand’s work allowed me to differentiate my own project from aspects of some late 20th and early 21st century art, particularly as such postmodern work has often put the demonstration of our knowing ahead of the task of affecting outlooks. *God* (1989) by the contemporary artist Damien Hirst might represent a well-known example of the perceived trend, as this work is part of his celebrated ‘medicine cabinet’ series that seems to show our faith in medicine back to us, without addressing the issue itself (Hirst, 2010). Peter Timms associates such art with ‘a sort of school-masterish didacticism that wants to convince us of nothing more than our supposed inability to think [issues] through’ (Timms, 2004, 171). To return to Zetterstrand’s work, it seemed to me that it depended upon a critiqued objectifying perspective to effect an arresting (as opposed to affecting) kind of surprise. I understood that it was the reproduction of that surprise which kept his work enjoyable. In this sense, his painting seemed to be somewhat complicit with the subjects that his
deconstruction ostensibly challenged. I became clear that I wanted to use art to pursue a perspective capable of diffusing the enduring surprise of his *Wanderer* painting.

As I became disturbed by my own involvement in a perceived self-deceit, so I became disposed to describing my research pursuit in terms of an overcoming of stasis that might be anticipated by a particular kind of genealogical experience. This understanding of genealogy was informed by Nietzsche’s book *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which significantly opens with a recollection of an inscription above the oracle’s cave at Delphi that simply read ‘Know thyself’ (Nietzsche, 1998, 3). Nietzsche believes that meeting this challenge will lead to a destabilization of the faith in one’s own subjectivity. His vision of genealogy might, then, be distinguished from the familiar genealogical process of creating a family tree—as the latter seeks to map the origins of an accepted identity. The recognition began to intensify my nascent relationship with Nietzsche as it also had me suspecting myself of some lazy complicity with a perspective that was cutting me off from the activity of things. A formerly opaque passage from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* took on a new resonance that sealed the embryonic philosophical relationship as it nevertheless supported my transformative cause. This in effect amounted to the animation of material things formerly perceived as inert:

I love him who maketh his virtue his inclination and destiny: thus for the sake of his virtue, he is willing to live on, or live no more.

[...] I love him who is ashamed when the dice fall in his favour, and who then asketh ‘Am I a dishonest player?’ – for he is willing to succumb.¹⁶

(Nietzsche, 1997, 8–9)

The excerpt represents Nietzsche’s acknowledgement of the difficulty Western subjects might have in accepting the poor worth of their own perspectives. Yet it is also provides some cushion for a falling pride inasmuch as it accepts that a subject capable of such a crushing critique has already distinguished itself, as improving (and so becoming), by embarking upon the journey of redemption. As the forthcoming section of this chapter engages with philosophy, then, it is also understood to register the expanding affects of its writing actually occurring. In its unfolding, my account will also represent my acquaintance with Nietzsche’s principle of ‘will to power’: a ‘joy of

¹⁶ This constant self-questioning, encouraged by Nietzsche, differentiates the supposed succumbing from the dissolutions of an immersion.
concord’ but also ‘a firm, iron magnitude of force’ which crucially recognizes the physical dimension of change (Nietzsche, 1968, 550).

The notion of will to power can be understood in terms of its defiance of the prevalent idea of cause and effect. This conflict comes about because it has the things we often perceive to be objects and/or agents re-conceptualized as productions within an unfolding explosion—and, so, at the mercy of its pre-established process-chemistry: if we could sit outside of any outburst we might identify one cause, namely the ‘bang’ as it goes off. We would then perceive the changing effects as determined through the conditions of the originating instant, and never as determining entities in themselves. However, given will to power supposes that people are actually effects occurring within in this process (i.e. constituting, and effects of, its forceful blast), its philosophy would ask us to acknowledge that cause is but one momentous instant associative with the ‘b’ of the bang. As such, will to power remains forever beyond any human’s perception, even as their apparently objective interpretations might help to constitute its effects through a selective process of incorporation which attests to the activity of its force:

The suddenness with which many effects stand out misleads us; actually it is only sudden for us. In this moment of suddenness there is an infinite number of processes that elude us. An intellect that could see cause and effect as a continuum and a flux and not, as we do, in terms of arbitrary division and dismemberment, would repudiate the concept of cause and effect and deny all conditionality.

(Nietzsche, 1974, 172–173)

What is important, here, is the encouraged identification with one unfolding process. This supposes an essential level of involvement between everybody and everything in the cosmos—as it highlights the positive affect of a mutual bearing, of all things upon each other.

Although will to power was not directly productive in terms of the research project (given its cosmological totality, any encounter with will to power itself is impossible), I found its holistic model of existence was able to evoke, intellectually support, and inspire my process-led developments.
1.1.3

From Scenes to Scenarios

As I later reflected on my challenged appreciation of *The Wanderer*—which lacked a sense that its painter’s representational technique defied my recognition of the immersive invitation of realism—I supposed that my newly questioned gaze had formerly accepted the classical correlation between reality, vision, and geometry. I understood this to mean that the ‘I’ that was my subjectivity had been wielding a certain primacy over the felt experience of the seeing eye (which evidently couldn’t realize this classical expectation) even as it depended upon its optical capacities, to define its objects.

In his book, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Erwin Panofsky considers the primacy of perspective in Renaissance art. He writes that as it elevated art to a science it also amounted to the ‘objectification of the subjective’ (Panofsky, 1991, 66). Anne Friedberg’s book, *The Virtual Window*, seizes on this revision of the Enlightened notion—that people can be subjected by the inevitability of substantial objects—to affirm a link between ‘the Cartesian cogito’ and the postmodern prevalence of, what has become known as, a ‘scopic regime’.

According to Friedberg, the latter has effaced the agency of physical scenarios (which involve the matter of both the body and objects in any psychological outcomes) through its nihilistic vision of materiality. This pre-establishes the meaning of any sensual relations, leaving things apparently unchanged by the agencies involved in their perception (Friedberg, 2009, 42–48). To come to terms with the philosophical influence of Cartesian cogito, I began reading Rene Descartes’ 1640 book, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1987).

Descartes’ radical doubt seemingly conflicted with ideas of a scopic certainty. Nevertheless, the latter idea sat easily with his stratification of matter, into cognitive and sensed components—particularly as it came with a certain elevation of concepts over the latter. This was clearest in his fifth meditation’s hierarchical consideration of a purely conceptual geometrical form:

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17 Martin Jay has suggested that the idea of a scopic regime had a defining moment in 1988 when attendees of a Dia Art Foundation conference, in New York, gathered together to discuss ‘the question of the cultural determinations of visual experience in the broadest sense’. These proceedings apparently encouraged conjecture on a supposition that ocular views might be analogous with intellectual ‘world-views’, and so formed through an interested lens constructed in the perceiver’s social environment (Jay, 2011, 40–41).
It would be beside the point for me to say that since I have from time to time seen bodies of a triangular shape, the idea of the triangle may have come to me from external things by means of the sense organs.

(Descartes, 1987, 45)

Whilst some art-historical familiarity with Friedrich’s Romantic milieu allowed me to accept that his art was attempting to move subjective thought back towards the material environment, Descartes’ *Meditations* supported my sense that it had only done so through an Enlightened perceptual structure. A similar connection between art and Descartes’ ideas was subsequently recognized in the story of material culture’s archaeological matrix. Classical archaeology, in particular, has made creative demands on concepts for restorative sculptural undertakings that attempted to complete fragmented archaeological discoveries.\(^{18}\) In doing so its practitioners effected mnemonic performances which aimed to replay the perspectives of our ancestors. Nevertheless, such speculations were often defended through their assumed constancy with timeless transcendental schema (Gelerntner, 1995, 70), which eclipsed—in significance—the delimiting role of the human body. I might explain this further through the well-known image of Vitruvian man.

\[\text{Figure 1.4: Reproduced from} \langle \text{http://leonardodavinci.stanford.edu/submissions/clabaugh/history/leonardo.html} \rangle.\]

\(^{18}\) It is my sense that restorative undertakings are unpopular today, but this arguably affords further metaphysical speculation on the concept of an ‘authentic’ object (see Howard, 2003, 25–44).
Leonardo da Vinci’s most famous 1490 illustration (see Figure 1.4) comes after a model of ideal architecture in Book III of *De Architectura*, by Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (a Roman architect active in the 1st century BC). The influential descriptions behind da Vinci’s image represented the oneness of the physical and the spiritual as it shared a classical notion of religious buildings, which aligned their perfection with the form of the human bodies that fabricated them:

It is worthy of remark, that the measures necessarily used in all buildings and other works, are derived from the members of the human body, as the digit, the palm, the foot, the cubit, and that these form a perfect number […]. The ancients considered ten a perfect number, because the fingers are ten in number, and the palm is derived from them, and from the palm is derived the foot.

*(De Architectura, Book III, ch. 1, para. 5)*

In the original literary model, then, as the body described a form it also manifested an ideal. In this sense, spirituality and physicality could be understood to be analogous (Lehman, 2001, 256). But even at the time of his writing, the practical questions which preoccupied Vitruvius competed with Platonic ideas, which supposed that all geometry ought to reflect a divine order. In an essay which has plotted the changes of form, meaning and value in Western civilization, John Haldane has identified the eventual hegemony of the Platonic transcendental reading in the aesthetic ideas of Alberti’s derivative 1485 book *On Architecture*—particularly as the latter propagated an assumption that ‘architecture should be identified with abstract design rather than material construction’ (Haldane, 2004, 244).

*Figure 1.5: Reproduced from* http://www.romaan-antica.co.uk/Vatican-Museums.php.
The challenge, which the perceived hegemony presented to physical matter, seemed evident in the restorations of *The Laocoon* sculpture, which was found in Rome, in 1506 (see Figure 1.5). Whilst the subject matter of this statue had a ready model in the human body in agony, the reinstatements of the figure’s missing right-arm apparently became a platform for realizing conceptual, and self-assuring, ideas of form and linearity (see Brilliant, 2000, esp. 36). Some critical reflection on this objective independence of form allowed me to associate its influence with my relationship with Friedrich’s *Wanderer*, as it had occurred (prior to the PhD) without any awareness of my own body. As this affirmed a contemporary, material culture, relevance it anticipated my own project, dedicated to the recovery of the body in pain (which will be shared through Part Four). I recognize this, now, because even as its story supported Panofsky’s identification of a subject being concretely affirmed by its own object—through the aesthetic disputes which involved only the pain of injured egos, rather than fleshy bodies—glimpses of its statue began to afford newly hopeful representations of an earthly body shadowing forth form.

So, even in the midst of a debate about concrete formal concepts, I began—through recognizing a scenario that was not centred on a subject—to glimpse the agency of a physical body at work in the subjective ideas of neoclassical aesthetes. Nicholas Davey has recognized the usefulness of recognizing complexity, in the midst of its subjective obfuscation, in his own address of the process of seeing. This suggests that the earthly is always in that which is apparently transcendental—just as the apparently transcendental also helps to configure the matter of the earth:

> [C]onfusion is of the essence not because aesthetic experience is a tiresome muddle but because it is a productive bringing together, a confusion of thought and perception which enables us to see the idea embodied in a work and to see the work as an instance of the idea.

(Davey, 1999, 8 [emphasis in original])

On one level, it did seem as if the representation of a fog in Friedrich’s *Wanderer* symbolically acknowledged the presence of ‘confusion’. However, given the new awareness of Alberti’s screen in my perception of the painting, I sensed that its perspective turned any flux into an object. This suggested that the wanderer’s subjectivity—whose image arguably recalls the subjectivity behind his own rendering technique (through his own limited capacity for movement on the mountain peak, as it
is evocative of the static individual in Figure 1.2)—was expected to be appreciated as self-assured even as his eyes registered a clouded view. This reading is supported by the art-historian Norbert Wolf, who understands that Friedrich’s slightly archaic choice of dress for the wanderer figure operates as a celebration of a Germanic subject (rather than a monument which marks its passing), which remains ‘strangely’ steadfast even in the midst of the apparent dissolution (Wolf, 2003, esp. 57).

Nevertheless, as my fresh understanding of The Laocoon had fore-grounded a relational scenario of Enlightened subjects encountering things (as opposed to an experience which recognized their abstract ideas alone), so I also began to identify with The Wanderer’s elevated overview. This perceptual hovering afforded a pivotal question: what might all the things represented in Friedrich’s image be doing? Raising this question drew me further into the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer—who I had begun speculatively reading due to his philosophical influence upon Nietzsche’s ideas (as accepted in Nietzsche, 2003, 16).

In his essay, ‘On Philosophy and the Intellect’, Schopenhauer wrote that as representations pointed to a real world exterior to the observer, they actually gave up—in their process—an unmediated experience of reality through the will of the ‘I’ (Schopenhauer, 1970, 117–132). The perspective was apparently afforded by Schopenhauer’s refusal of any transcendental divine (Hollingdale, 1970, 34–35). He could subsequently repudiate the assumption of some human specialness, which allowed people to suppose they were observing things, without accepting that they were actually ‘doing’ the earth in the process. The subsequent positing of will (rather than concepts) as the basis of human knowledge seemed to conflict with the ideas of Descartes because it supposed that the ‘quality of our thoughts [... originates] from within, [but] their direction, and thus their matter, from without’ (Schopenhauer, 1970, 123). My nascent sensibility for scenarios allowed me to grasp Schopenhauer’s assertion that the object of thought was to the mind ‘what the plectrum is to the lyre,’ and from this perspective it was the drive that brought about thinking which could be identified with the notion of reality (Schopenhauer, 1970, 123).

A further essay, ‘On Various Subjects’, seemed to reflect the influence of Buddhism in Schopenhauer’s ideas as it supposed that the physicality shared by people and things amounted to a rubric that embodied the essential oneness between them. This suggested that ‘inanimate’ things were actively unfolding as they exercised forces analogous with the willful bearing of people (Schopenhauer, 1970, 212–213).
Schopenhauer’s ideas supported my emerging capacity for an overview that was increasingly recognizing the active occurrence of all things, as they also illuminated the ideas of Nietzsche. Nevertheless, any animating effects were mitigated by the latter’s philosophical riposte, to Schopenhauer, which argued that his supposition that things were singular economies, of self-sufficient individuals, could not give rise to a forceful striving toward as any given thing would, in effect, amount to its own and only reference—forestalling any changing activity (Nietzsche, 2007, 35–36). I supposed that Nietzsche’s relational revision of Schopenhauer’s independent ‘will’ was commensurate with will to power—as it identifies becoming things with the mutually transformative affects of encounters (Nietzsche, 1998, 59).

For Nietzsche, then, the issue of encounters themselves eclipsed—in significance—both the one-sided humanist perspective (which seems to withstand today in the powerful, self-interested, popular outlooks which urge resources to be directed towards projects focused on the human condition) (Ley and Samuels, 1978, 1–18) and Schopenhauer’s progressive (inasmuch as it is more inclusive) faith in a cosmos of individual, if actively bearing, agents. An appreciation of this illuminated one of Nietzsche’s own letters to his friend, Peter Gast. In it, he explained that his summer retreat in the Swiss Alps boasted ‘a mountain range for company, but not a dead one, one with eyes […]’ (Nietzsche cited in Jaspars, 1997, 374). This scenario announced itself to me as immediately ready for some transposition onto Caspar David Friedrich’s painting, where it seemed to have the wanderer posing for the landscape’s own ‘camera’ even as he, himself, captured it: a mutual engagement then and one that, in granting a level of subjectivity to all actants in the scene, posited the figure and the mountains as each at once exposing of and exposed to the matter of the other. As the research progressed, I looked for opportunities that might afford some persuasive propagation of this animating sensibility. One opportunity was glimpsed in the consideration of masks, which was evoked in Nietzsche’s letter and became newly relevant in my appreciation of Friedrich’s art.

In his book *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox*, David Napier recognizes that the superficial surfaces of masks create an area of interdisciplinary overlap that involves philosophy, archaeology, theatre studies and performance theory. In ancient drama, the

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19 The term ‘actants’ is borrowed from Bruno Latour. He often seems to use it, in lieu of ‘actors’, perhaps because it helps to maintain some idea of difference between people and other things (an issue I will revisit in Part 2.2). I have used the term, here, because I myself was still disposed to thinking in this categorical way (at this point in the research) even as I began challenging the distinction between humans and non-humans.
theatrical term *prosopon* designated a mask, but it also invoked the movement of one thing toward the ‘eye’ of another. These ideas of movement and the maintenance of difference—as they associated materiality with a mutual process, rather than an object (Napier, 1986, 8)—were kept at the forefront of my mind. I had, then, perhaps begun to effect the kind of mask I was thinking (which is to say I was creating a way of being which was equal to, and appropriate for, my knowledge and understanding of process), but it would take a further project (the one represented in the following chapter) to develop and exploit some mindfulness of this outlook.

Before I proceed, I might summarize this chapter by saying that as its research established the conditions of an ‘experiential genealogy’ it helped me to realize art’s capacity to critically convey me to a place where the boundaries of my own (subjective) outlook were established. The ensuing personal consciousness of my own anthropocentric perception invited the experiment with perceptual dimensions which forms the basis of Part 1.2. As the latter’s documentation describes its performance, it will also share a deepening relationship with Nietzsche; this helped to take the purpose of the practice beyond an engagement with spatiality, towards the cosmology of will to power and, then, the psychoanalytical philosophy of Jacques Lacan. The further interdisciplinary interest proved important as it allowed the subjective limits, determined through this chapter’s research, to begin bearing back on me for a process of change.
1.2

Facing Things

1.2.1

A Small Epiphany

Oneday, I found myself watching my wife as she attempted to resolve a Rubik’s cube.\(^{20}\) I was engrossed on many levels; one I later described (in my research notes) as traditionally aesthetic because when my wife paused to stare at a cube face, for the benefit of the puzzle’s resolution, I was also presented with a single face of the 3D object (the interference of fingers excepted). This surface was composed—much like its significant others—of nine squares of varying colour; as it occurred in the moment of a doing arrested, I felt like I was being presented with a pose—which is to say a kind of picture. The cube surface that was ‘interposed’ between us and this fixed my gaze in much the same way (and for much the same reasons) that a Constructivist painting might hold my attention.

I also noted that my entertaining experience of seeing the puzzle, and even the cube object itself, seemed to defy my striving for some clean categorical distinctions as it began a dialogue, and initiated a tension, between possibilities of meaning-making. Nevertheless, the sudden stops of the cube’s ‘doer’ ostensibly reproduced the frieze of ‘the gesture’, which in art—and psychoanalysis—is widely understood to be a demand for a viewer to complete its purpose through the attribution of meaning (in the sense that gestures tend to actualize a history, shared by a doer and a viewer, they also recognize the interpersonal dimensions of a scenario) (Frie, 1997, 188). Yet this posing was, as far as I could tell, merely an apparent invitation that I’d found myself

\(^{20}\) Popular in the UK in the early 1980s, Rubik’s cube is a 3D combination puzzle with an internal mechanism that allows its sides to be twisted and turned. Its resolution demands that the cube’s six faces are rotated so each side becomes a single colour.
answering—structurally indistinguishable from gesturing but different at the level of purpose, at least as far as I was concerned (the idea of completion ‘through the attribution of meaning’ still being appropriate for my wife’s relationship with the ‘interposing’ cube). Moreover, whilst my pictorial perception of the cube’s surface (i.e. as an aesthetic ‘picture’ rather than some meaningful code) deviated from this surface’s function within the puzzle, it was not entirely distinct from it, either physically or conceptually; I even found myself sharing some satisfaction and frustration (though on a purely aesthetic level) as the surfaces became increasingly uniform or variant in colour.

My allusion to the Constructivist paintings that perceived some essence in colour and form was, then, not categorically distinct from the cube face as a function of the puzzle. Nevertheless there was some uneasiness with the allocation, because the surface seemed to be beyond the fine art discourse inasmuch as the representation which I was seeing was neither directly intentional, nor intentionally non-intentional and ‘purely’ aesthetic; it existed (in the main?) for the purposes of difference—that is, to distinguish one face from another. Furthermore, whilst the resolution of the cube was relatively trivial, it could not be said to be without a wider social meaning for my wife (judging from her desire to communicate her levels of success) and the image in my field of vision had a representational relationship with that meaning (it being produced by the opposing, different, face of the cube) without being reducible to it.

The cube event is recalled, here, because it documents the effects of my changing subjectivity—as it began to operate in a social world. I say this because it registers my consciousness in its fresh capacity to entertain two, somewhat conflicting, views of the cube. It is also presented in its assistance to this research project—as the level of disparity, once recognized, seemed to demand some resolution. The process of coming to terms with the conflict describes a format that acknowledges material culture’s thinside, as it accesses it in terms of its participatory event.

1.2.2
A Puzzling Object

In order to recognize its potential importance, I recreated the Rubik’s cube scenario for a video. I supposed that this would allow me to revisit its relations at will and that the process of videoing, itself, might afford me opportunities to interfere, and experiment, with the puzzle process—as the human participants (i.e. me and my wife) accepted that the visual content of a movie, rather than the game, was now the project’s end. This
issue, of changing purpose and intention, extended to the subsequent, private, reviews of the videoed content. These afforded an opportunity to look at the scene in a way that significantly modified the enworlded²¹ scenario (described previously, in section 1.2.1), as the fresh medium allowed me to look at the unfolding process alone rather than with my wife. This work is illustrated in the video, Square, on DVD 1.

Even as I created a movie for my own viewing, then, I was nevertheless engaging with video art-making. I say this because the work similarly created a technological feedback, in order to allow some control over two events which would otherwise be synchronous—namely public material culture relations, and the parameters that allow individuals their own responses to these relations (Antin, 1986, 148). I chose to do this because I speculated that the process of seeing my own seeing, through a recorded restaging, would allow me to grasp what had already begun to change in my perception. This was understood to be necessary because even as these changes were perceived to be of benefit to this PhD project—in their growing recognition of an object’s agency—they could scarcely be communicated (for development) within my anthropocentric social milieu.

²¹ Broadly speaking, an enworlded experience refers to the thinking of things as they might be meant or accepted by others within one’s public milieu (Holmes, 1993, 128).
because its speculative searches for a recognizably similar visual field allowed me to notice that the experience of an upright observation, which looked down on the puzzle (represented in Figure 1.6), was qualitatively distinct from the affects of seeing with my eyes level with the cube (Figure 1.7 is a shot from this angle).

Figure 1.8 acknowledges all the points of view (POVs) implicated in the recreation process. In so doing, it highlights how the cube’s general angle of repose, for the eyes of a seated doer (at ‘a’), presented a flat surface (2) to my eyes at position ‘b’ but two oblique faces (2 and 3) to my eyes at position ‘c’. The different visual fields produced two distinct responses with the latter generating a sense of tension, whilst the former seemed a more comfortable, or securing, viewing experience; I speculated that the latter confidence emerged because the two dimensions of the flat presentation were coincident with the plane of Alberti’s window—with its promise of an inevitable, or total, object. However, with my eyes at position ‘c’, the cube’s further dimensions—as these included the picture plane that faced my wife—were brought into my consideration.

For the purposes of the set-up my wife was still and posing. However in the instance of the scene shared through the experience in 1.2.1, the cube was variously rotated and rested in a single process, which effectively took in the perspectives of ‘b’ and ‘c’ in its on-looking experience. Through some further experimentation with video images, I was able to align the subsequent sense of a ‘thing-side’ to the Rubik’s cube event with its acceptance of the three visual fields of ‘a’, ‘b’ and ‘c’. Some ensuing performances, by
myself, for a camera included recreations which variously privileged rotations of the
cube (stills from such a video constitute Figure 1.9) and poses where I gazed
extensively at a cube face in between trying to resolve its puzzle (the collection of stills
in Figure 1.10 represent this kind of performance).

Figure 1.9

Figure 1.10 (below)
The process of performing for the videos allowed me to variously dwell on the Rubik’s cube in terms of both its four-dimensional aspects, and in terms of the picture of a single flat face. But it was the process of viewing the resulting body of video work that allowed me to recognize that the cube’s capacity for affect lay in a realm of conflict between perspectives—rather than any sum of their differing content.

1.2.3
The Look of Things

The research significance of the realm of conflict, identified above, became clear after I engaged with the philosophical influence of a similar tension—between different interpretations of a single thing—that was identified in Jacques Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (1994). A useful parallel was recognized in the book’s recollection of a conversation between a young Lacan and a fisherman who was once given the task of training him in the ways of the sea. Upon noticing a twinkling sardine tin floating in the water, the old salt apparently pointed it out to his apprentice and said ‘You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn’t see you!’ (Lacan, 1994, 95). Lacan’s instructor was pointing out that the maritime environment was exposing his student as a landlubber (i.e. someone ignorant of the ways of the sea). Crucially, for his later career as a psychoanalyst, Lacan recognized that taking the offence intended meant strangely acknowledging that the floating thing could be seen in two distinct ways: one being as if it were an impression of its twinkling light and the other being as an object of the subjectivity from which the fisherman was excluding him.

Lacan subsequently found himself caught between competing interpretations of the sardine tin; given the legitimacy of each discernment, his ensuing explanation, of perceiving things, also began to challenge the notion of a subjugating inevitability that might be associated with prevalent models of objecthood—as they suppose that things are independent substantial entities which express themselves.

A subsequent model of visual perception by Lacan recognized the bearing of light itself in the perception of the twinkling tin. A related illustration of a (human) subject’s seeing process represents this as an activity that comes from a thing (i.e. it is an effect of the thing) even as it ostensibly aims to describe the activity of a human subject’s
perception. Moreover, the symmetry of Lacan’s ensuing illustration supposes some equivalence between the illumination of the object’s light and the intentional activity of a subject, as it aims to recognize an object.

Figure 1.11: My adaptation of Lacan’s ‘bow-tie’ drawing of perception.

My adaptation of Lacan’s ‘bow-tie’ drawing, in Figure 1.11, as it supposes that the object gazes, allowed me to dwell on this human/non-human ambivalence. The Rubik’s cube scenario had a similar capacity—i.e. for suggesting a level of object activity, by drawing attention to the affecting sensitivity of its interfaces—through its creation of an analogous level of tension. Furthermore, it seemed to achieve this without reproducing the nihilism of the fisherman’s humiliating joke (as it negates Lacan’s presence in the maritime environment). I will develop this issue, as it relates to the reanimation of objects, in Part Two. But for now I will share the increasing recognition of my perception’s thing-side, as it grew further through noticing that Lacan’s representation of perception might amount to a revision of Leon Alberti’s model (see Figure 1.2)—albeit one which emphasises the exchange between meeting surfaces by bequeathing each side of the event with both subjective and objective (or

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22 Through the identification of the cone of light narrowing into an eye, Lacan was free to re-imagine the visible object in terms of infinite, but delimited, points of light that loom out from surfaces as if beams from a torch. The beam ends only where it meets a further surface and Lacan describes this plane as a ‘picture’. This two dimensional surface of light is inevitably interpreted when it meets a subject, generating an eruption of signification which screens the thing from the subject, even as that thing affords the total object of the picture (Hays, 2010, 98–101).
incorporating and incorporated) aspects. By mirroring Alberti’s model of light entering the eye, it appears that Lacan could include this light’s forceful emission from a point on the surface of a perceived object—along with its accepted shrinkage into an eye. Likewise, as the seeing human eye bears on the object (to interpret or, rather, incorporate it) so it seems to activate the surface that it exposes.

Lightly buried in this bowtie drawing is, then, some compelling supposition of a thingly ‘subject’ that interprets as it is interpreted. I say this because it affirms that as a subject perceives an object, so the object effectively determines (and so objectifies) a subject. As my views of Rubik’s cube reproduced the tension in fisherman’s anecdote, so it similarly allowed me to recognize a meeting, which supposed some agency on the side of all its constitutive parts. In this sense it recovered a glimpse of holism, from (and perhaps for) the nihilistic singularity of the objectifying Western lens.

I began to associate both the cube experiences and Lacan’s explanatory model with the reciprocity of *prosopn* introduced towards the end of the previous chapter; whilst I am clear that the latter did not exactly sanction any projection of the synaesthetic experiences that its invocation came after, it nevertheless helped me to sympathize with material things as it suggested that my own stirrings occurred along with the alteration of the things that ‘moved’ me.

The research represented in Part 1.1 developed a way of encountering things that heightened an awareness of my own bearing, and the practice-as-research with Rubik’s Cube then allowed me to increasingly identify that forceful and affecting sensibility with things bearing back at me. As this transformed object experiences into single events with a human and non-human side, I supposed it afforded some sensibility that was consistent with the affecting reciprocity inherent in Nietzsche’s concept of will to power. The potential of such a disposition to supplant the subjective emphasis on being, with a susceptibility for becoming, is suggested in his *Genealogy of Morals*—particularly as it acknowledges that all things are constantly in the process of being generated through their encounters with other things. As this confounds any idea of an individual agent, it also supposes that ‘there is no “being” behind doing, acting, becoming’, only its ‘fiction’ (Nietzsche, 1998, 29). The ensuing research—represented in Part Two—accepted this (more than it endeavoured to come to terms with it), and its outcomes aimed to meet the challenge of discursively engaging, and sharing, the effects of its dissolutions.
Part Two
2.0.1 Overview

The ostensibly illustrative movie, *Square* on DVD 1 (which readers were referred to in Part 1.2.2), was made to replace and represent a body of video work which I had destroyed. Indeed, the title of the restorative movie broadly refers to a process of completing one thing in terms of another (just as much as it recognizes a two dimensional shape formed by Rubik’s cube). The destruction of the original recordings was deemed necessary because the cube ‘prop’ they worked with was an annoyingly faulty example. Part 2.1 will show how the duplicating task furthered the progression of the thesis: its continuation of Part One’s mimetic techniques foregrounds a research methodology that engages with the issue of difference. Moreover, as this engagement is accepted to be the result of a subjective frustration, which led to the destruction of the original videos, the part begins to highlight the positive role of the Western ego in the production of the thesis.

The part progresses with a project of painting a Coke can red. This is the first creative project in this PhD research to thematically engage with the issue of difference itself: as the glistening of wet red paint both restates and disturbs an intended object, it is accepted to provide some structure for an animating revision of the Coke can thing. The re-vitalizing engagement will be identified with mimetic logics, as it illuminates the conditional nature of subjective experience. The ensuing, relational, sensibility affords a pivotal re-conception of mind, as an effect of material culture (rather than something centred and causal).

The work outlined above anticipates Part 2.2, as it engages with the painting project’s procurement of an ontological levelling, which is based on its establishment of a material, and relational, understanding of mind. This philosophical reflection on the animating issue of panpsychism, in particular, continues Part 1.1’s lonely environmental circumstances, and foreshadows a video project which recorded a suspended leaf. An ensuing performance, which engaged with the content through the process of not seeing it, afforded some engagement with a cosmological drive while accepting the possibilities and limits of my rather private approach to art.
2.1
Making Difference

2.1.1
Recovering Mimesis

Over a period of a few months, following their creation, the recordings for the research described in Part 1.2 became reconceived in terms of a haunting curse. I say this because the puzzle process they documented involved a Rubik’s cube with a wobbly brick; this tended to repose at awkward angles (which paused the cube rotations as it demanded some readjustment). On occasion the disruptive slouching became a complete refusal of the cube’s game, and the awkward brick would simply drop out of the parent project. This prompted expletives on the side of the puzzle’s human doer, as they were forced to retrieve the reluctant fragment from the floor. A level of familiarity meant that I could ignore the punk block, and its disruptive effects, for the research exposure. Nevertheless, I was concerned that its agency would steal the show, in the event of sharing its research role with an unacquainted audience.

A subsequent dwelling on the brick’s anarchic antics would have me regretting its input, and I came to question the capacity of the videos to support anything of my thesis. Given this, I decided to make an entirely new video, with a fully functioning cube. However, if the restorative outcome can be understood to be adequate to this demonstrative task, the restaging process usefully foregrounded the key performance themes of repetition and mimesis—extending the research role of Square.

In their book, Drama/Theatre/Performance, Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis draw upon the work of Paul Woodruff to describe mimesis as ‘the art of arranging one thing to have an effect that properly belongs to another’ (Woodruff cited in Shepherd and Wallis, 2004, 212). This careful definition is preferred over English approximations of the terminology—such as imitation, copy, fake and duplicate—because it recognizes
the dimensions of change which can conspicuously occur as one thing is made to stand in for something else. Nevertheless, whilst Woodruff’s description is understood to come after Aristotle’s positive revision of Plato’s anxious take on the concept (the latter stressing a capacity for displacement which might rightly be associated with the English correlates, listed above, and their negative connotations), its acceptance of symbolism still carries something of the latter’s deleterious emphasis; this associates copies with loss and want.

In the case of my own project, negative connotations might be glimpsed in the decision to set my copy of missing research material apart from the other videos (i.e. those on DVD 2). I say this because it recognizes my early feeling that a copy could not constitute the thesis proper. The differentiating judgement might recall an adverse perspective famously propagated through the analogy of the cave, which opens Book VII of Plato’s Republic. This suggests that representations should be considered pale due to their degrading derivation from an ideal original (Plato, The Republic, Book VII, 514a–520a). Essentially, Plato supposes that copies invite a comparison with that which is copied. Nevertheless, it positively points to the creative capacity, within the referential process of replication, to exploit our identification of—and faith in—individual entities, to draw attention to difference itself. Given this, it could be said that an object determined in such comparative circumstances has the ready potential to be reconceived as an effect of relationships.

2.1.2 Dimensions of Change

In his 2010 book, In Praise of Copying, Marcus Boon argues that the creative tension of mimetic acts exposes our deep-seated faith in inner essence, particularly as it stretches to an anxiety about a diminishment of individuality that might be caused by its copy.¹ Moreover, Boon suggests that the related pursuit of originality and individuality—as it has been championed in Western art—might negatively frame the process dimensions of materiality (which might include the affecting presence of things) as nihilistic and dark; so placing its full exploration outside of the former’s moral agenda (Boon, 2010, 26–27).

¹ As a child, I was haunted by nightmares that involved a doppelganger who displaced me in a community. The theme is explored in the 1970 horror film The Man who Haunted Himself (dir. Basil Dearden). I might usefully note that the anxiety, as it might be associated with some threat to an individual’s sense of self-importance, helped to determine my faith in the kinaesthetic experience of the environment, described in Part 1.1.2.
I would suggest that the apparent disposability of much contemporary material culture registers the worldview critiqued by Boon. The endless repetition of mass-produced items (as it occurs without reference to a recognisable original) seems to completely negate notions of value that might lie outside of the self. To explain, industrially manufactured things tend to be rationalized selfishly by their consumers, and manufacturers, as they are accepted to have a market value (which relates to the cost to a purchasers time). Once owned, such objects are appreciated only in terms of the advantage they might lend the owner in a human world (this is to say they are perceived as equipment). In this sense they apparently become somewhat identical to our own lives in their perception (I will return to something of this issue in Part Three).

If my own disposal of video footage, and a culpable Rubik Cube, exemplified the selfishness described above, then the experience of recreating the destroyed recordings deployed its faith in essence, as the level of mimesis had me recalling the wobbly brick in terms of the difference it made between the moment of inspiration, which the first videos aimed to reproduce, and the restorations that were careful (through the use of a new cube) to diminish any such agency—even as they aspired to reproduce the visual event of the research. In this sense, the restaging process allowed me to register the negativity of a subjective unease that had formerly been disposed to counterproductive acts (such as throwing away the first video works).

The new profile for the ‘I’ that had destroyed some documents allowed me to recognize a positive role for the ego in the thesis, particularly as its frustration usefully acknowledged a level of apparent object anarchy—as it perceived an object which nevertheless resisted its assimilation into my world. Moreover, its recovery of the former nihilism arguably registered a new, more open, subjectivity as a research outcome; one capable of recovering a Western faith in essence, and its related negativity, as a positive force for developing a process-led relationship with material culture.

Given the above, if the mimetic act of restaging videos allowed me to recover the significance of some changes in content, it was no less effective in its register of a difference between viewing subjects (each of which might rightly be identified with the body which constitutes me). I will return to the particular implications of this in Part 2.1.4.
2.1.3
A Questioning Thing

As the writing above recognized the emergence of a holistic perspective consistent with the notions of process and becoming—through its positive recovery of a negative event—then its methodological acceptance of mimesis, and its affect, was anticipated by a project which involved the painting of a coke tin. I titled this work *Reel*, in recognition of the round tin object and the turning process involved in its painting. The simultaneous appeal, to a noun and a verb, would come to be adopted as a constancy for naming my art throughout this PhD, as it came to identify whole performance-led projects which produced secondary, if representational, artefacts that shared the parent title. However, at this stage in the research the idiom had yet to be enforced, and *Reel’s* representational video was called *After the Real Thing* (see DVD 2).² This recognized the work’s mimetic dilemma, and the Coke brand’s claims to be authentic.³

![Figure 2.1: A still from the video ‘After the Real Thing’.](image)

² In setting up the performance event, I felt that the can turning process was important because it was determined by a painting method that allowed me to keep focused—the rotation afforded access to unpainted areas, whilst allowing my eyes to keep fixed on the significant surface (I would suggest that this experience foreshadowed my interest in the phenomenological process of ‘bracketing’ described in Part 2.3.4). As such, I documented this turning process along with the affecting painting. The two videos were then brought together, through a split-screen, to make a single performance document; the video on DVD 2 is a shortened, but representative, version of this. The movie’s music, incidentally, comes from a favourite CD that I played as I painted and it represents only my need for some rhythmical accompaniment to my brushwork.

³ I recognize that Coke’s claim to be ‘the real thing’ was accepted in the decision to name the umbrella project, *Reel*. 
The work recorded in *Real Thing* took its lead from the magical aspirations of copying, as they were documented in the opening paragraph of Part 1.1. But if the former project—built on the experience of drawing Friedrich’s *Wanderer* painting—had moved swiftly on from a thematic focus on the mimetic act (through its emphasis on the conceptually divisional, if thematically related, task of distinguishing the experiential alternatives of feeling and seeing), I nevertheless suspected that the representational issues of displacement and disappearance themselves (as these were pursued, in different ways, through my copying of Friedrich’s painting and the latter’s own realism) might hold some key to a cosmological methodology. I supposed this would come through their apparent *promise* to unite quite different objects and materials (the green paint of painted trees and the leaves of trees themselves, for example).

I was, then, already ‘primed’ when some small tins of red Airfix enamel paint, which had been cluttering my pencil-case for a few years,\(^4\) triggered an aspiration to realize the realist conceit, of hiding the existence of paint—through the act of representation. However, as I had already accepted that this achievement depended upon a level of skill beyond my artistic abilities, I chose to overlay my painting on top of an actual object—rather than trying to represent its three dimensions on a flat surface (see Figure 2.1).

If the choice of object was delimited by the colour and tint of the paint I was trying to hide, then the decision to use a Coke tin as a ground for the experiment was influenced by its cultural status as a meta-commodity. This is to say that it not only represented an example of contemporary (capitalist) material relations, it was also understood to represent the way we engage with material culture as a sign—so becoming a site where power struggles play themselves out at the expense of any sensible materials at hand. Daniel Miller’s essay, pointedly entitled ‘Coca-Cola: A Black Sweet Drink from Trinidad’, endorsed and informed this perception, as it recognized that Coke containers and their drinkable contents have a symbolic capacity which typically transcend any of their visceral experiences—to the mind of both consumers and academic theorists alike.

\(^4\) A full explanation of how these tins came to be in my pencil-case exceeds the scope of this writing. Nevertheless I might allow some preliminary space for the issue of fate (that Nietzsche’s will to power supposes) by conceding that the interest in Morrissey—which determined something of the research in Part 1.1—extended to a fascination with his punk forebears, the New York Dolls (and Airfix enamel makes a cheap and durable alternative to nail varnish).
[Coke can] be filled with almost anything those who wish to either embody or critique a form of symbolic domination might ascribe to it. It may stand for commodities or capitalism, but equally Imperialism or Americanization. Such meta-symbols are amongst the most difficult objects of analytical enquiry since they operate through a powerful expressive and emotive foundation such that it becomes very difficult to contradict their claimed status. So Coca-cola is not merely material culture […].

(Miller, 2005, 55).

The Coke tin, then, promised to make the challenge of my proposed disappearing act a little easier, as the object seemed to procure a kind of recognition that promised to negotiate the disparity—between image and embodied experience—that compromised my conviction in Friedrich’s Wanderer illusion. However, if the colour match between the paint and the red of the Coke tin was close enough to have me questioning the former’s opacity then I found that the unfamiliar glaze—of the wet paint’s surface—began to solicit a stare as the Coke object seemed slightly less familiar—even as it was still recognizable. To revise Lacan’s anecdote of the sardine tin (described in Part 1.2.3), this was not so much an object that wasn’t seeing me, but rather one that was perhaps in need of glasses. The visual effect of the similarity, and its disturbance of my own gaze, seemed to be shared by my wife who (upon walking in on this process) raised a simple, but newly pertinent, question when she asked me whether or not the object in my hand was really a Coke can.5

I would suggest that the mimetic process of painting the Coke tin red made the paint disappear for me (the ‘reality’ of the paint never being questioned). It solicited a stare (i.e. an empty gaze, which does not recognize a subject) that might be associated not with two different surfaces but rather with difference itself. To expand: the procured gaze was not one that looked to distinguish the red of Airfix paint, from the red of the Coke can, rather it recognized an interruption; this seemed to stave off my tendency to ‘read’ the artefact as if it were text.

I might illuminate the perceived possibility of this further through drawing a parallel with the work of the contemporary artist Glenn Brown. His reproductions of paintings seem to produce images that continue the visceral expressionism of 20th century artists such as William de Kooning (who arguably resisted a Renaissance model of art through

5 My wife’s questioning was evocative of responses to René Magritte’s painting The Treachery of Images (1928–1929) which featured a painting of a pipe above the statement ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ (French for ‘this in not a pipe’). This artwork overtly procures the recognition of identity to question a viewer’s faith in the reality of representation (Castilla & Hay, 2008, 104).
paintings which wilfully foregrounded the presence and movement the gloopy medium) (Teilmann, 2007, 66; Trigg & Brown, 2009, 1–4). Nevertheless, Brown’s flat reproductions revisit the realist style and recall the same desire for verisimilitude, as this aspires to make the artist’s hand, and the materiality of paint, disappear.

*Figure 2.2: Reproduced from Art Monthly, issue 325 (April 2009), 1.*

The conflation appears to refuse the *trompe l’oeil* images, pursued by realist painters without fully recovering the art-historical materials, and body movements, which were targeted by expressionist painters. I would suggest that the combined effect of this, in paintings such as 2008’s *Comfortably Numb, Magenta* by Brown (see Figure 2.2), seems to strangely represent the relinquishment of the realist control of any represented object (and of the viewer who must be tricked into the belief in its presence), yet it is this renunciation that becomes the *trompe l’oeil* effect. But if the process of *Reel* produced a similar ambiguity, as it disturbed my faith in an object, its production through a transient process attempted to resist the satisfactions of Brown’s art. I say this because the *Reel* project lacked an art context, which would allow it to objectify (and so represent) the question itself. In other words, the different Coke can thing was never allowed to stand in for the experience of difference itself. Indeed, if anything was
found at all then it was only the experience of a subjective loss—as the certain presence of my subject could not be established without a certain object.

2.1.4
Bridging Mind

The experience of difference produced by Reel engaged me with a thing in its independence from any world (i.e. any meaningful context). However, the corresponding experience of difference itself made its work difficult to articulate, as it both resisted intelligibility and needed protection from art’s claims on creativity, lest it came to be an object standing in for (and so closing down) the experiential process. Nevertheless, the mimetic project described in this chapter’s outset allowed me to recognize Reel’s method and determine something of its logic.

As the acknowledgement of mimesis began to stretch the perceived timescale of my work (ideas of this and that becoming aligned with notions of then and now) my perception began to accept the bearing of more events in any given moment. In the case of the Rubik’s cube project, Square, this drew my attention both to my changing ways of engaging with difference and the emergence of an increasingly positive attitude to all things, as I came to terms with their contribution to a whole. This not only allowed me to recognize the negativity of my own ego, as it had destroyed the Rubik cube work that it felt unable to control, it also allowed me to positively recover the negativity’s usefulness for a whole. Moreover, this recovery allowed me to register the emergence of a subjectivity that paradoxically accepted Western perspectives for a project in pursuit of a process alternative. I would suggest that if the awareness of this came through the mimetic event of restaging the Rubik cube research, then as Reel had me engaging with difference and accepting (rather than occluding) its frustrations, it was nevertheless crucial for a positive subjective extension which pushed beyond the personal, as it had me considering the subjective dimensions of objecthood in terms of an individual thing. To expand: as this chapter opens with an account of an ‘anarchic’ brick in a Rubik cube it might register an acceptance of the apparent wilfulness of things. A research consciousness for this arguably came through Reel as it had me apprehending a Coke tin that stubbornly refused to yield to my gaze—whilst it also procured the openness of a stare (the significance of this being that the glimpse of an object’s wilfulness was not, then, easily dismissed as something childish or wrong).

In her book *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett suggests that dwelling on moments of object revolt can usefully defy a subjective perception of dead things, as their ‘small
but irreducible degree of independence [...] from the words, images, and feelings they provoke in us’ effects something of a human will (Bennett, 2010, xvi). Bennett strengthens her point through an invocation of Franz Kafka’s short story ‘The Cares of a Family Man’. This tale is a monologue wherein a human individual shares their story of a warm, if slightly tense, personal relationship with a dysfunctional spool of cotton (Kafka, 2011). The thing still recalls the domestic aid even as a rod, which sticks through its body, frustrates its function as a spool.

Bennett suggests that Kafka’s story represents the way that broken equipment can begin to exceed the objects they might first appear to be—to the extent that they can appear to take on the attributes we generally associate with human subjects. Bennett supposes that Kafka’s spool acquires human attributes in its indiscernibility. Indeed, it is the unexpected rod (which frustrates its purpose as a spool) that allows the object to stand upright like a human. But Kafka’s story also registers the emergence of its narrator’s new mind, and arguably establishes it as an effect of the spool. My point, here, is that the story does not simply revive an object formerly perceived as dead or inert. In registering mind as an effect of the spool it seems to reconceive it as a mode, rather than a means, of the story’s general theme of interpretation. This seems to be underscored by the wooden spool’s ‘laugh’, as it recalls the rustle of leaves in a tree from which its object was fashioned.

I would suggest, then, that if Kafka’s story is about a remarkable cotton spool, it is no less about the prosaic status of the human mind—as each is understood to be an effect, or expression, of one cosmological process. As Reel had me recognizing my stare as an effect of the Coke can, then, it procured a related ‘demotion’ of mind in an ontological levelling. This heightened my identification with things as I supposed the reciprocity of relations promised a bridge—one which might (in some sense) afford access to process’s happening, as it accepted that things and I were similarly produced from the interactions of meetings.
2.2

The Matter of Mind

2.2.1

Pausing for Thought

The re-conception of my own subjective experience, as an expression of the whole dynamic of the cosmos, brought with it the startling possibility that mind was not unique to humans, or (for that matter) any biological organisms at all. This prospect was underpinned by a relational appreciation of reality, which had been nurtured through my experience with the Coke can—particularly as its disturbance of the object had allowed me to experience its bearing in a perceptual event (as articulated in Part 2.1). This acceptance was also assisted by a suspicion that my own self might not be a centred origin of its own perspectives; this scepticism was encouraged through my literary method of reading Nietzsche. I mention this to stress the emergence of an appropriate understanding of my being, which accepted my own awareness as an experience of the cosmos happening. This accelerated the development of an active overview (i.e. it was beginning to occur along with my subjective perspectives, and not simply in some posterior reflection upon them), which could acknowledge that my subjective ‘I’ existed with objects in a dialogical fashion. This sensibility accepted that I was being produced by the activity of objects in the same moment I perceived them.

Considering myself as an effect, as much as a cause, of interpreting processes allowed me to recognize a level of drive in all things—including the inert objects that surrounded me. Given this, I became attuned to the panpsychic implications in Nietzsche’s idea of ‘will to power’. Panpsychism literally means ‘many minds’; it broadly affirms that all things have an aspect that is analogous with the human mind (Mathews, 2003, 4). The overlap with ‘will to power’ comes as each supposes that as objects interpret the world around them, so they undergo an experience, and express a kind of intention, analogous with the relational structure of our ‘own’ mind. The issue
is accepted in aphorism 627 of the book *Will to Power*, particularly as it aligns intention with a broad idea of interpretation (as it simply amounts to a response to another in which the interpreting thing acts to prevail):

‘Attraction’ and ‘repulsion’ in a purely mechanistic sense are complete fictions […]. We cannot think of an attraction divorced from an intention.—The will to take possession of a thing or to defend oneself against it and repel it—that, we ‘understand’: that would be an interpretation of which we could make use.

In short: the psychological necessity for a belief in causality lies in the inconcevability of an event divorced from intent; by which naturally nothing is said concerning truth or untruth (the justification of such a belief)! The belief in causae falls with belief in the tele […].

(Nietzsche, 1968, 335).

Adrian Del Caro seems to accept that the general thrust of the above pronouncement—as it affirms that the human mind is a particular mode of something omnipresent and inherently relational—refuses any ontological spaces between intentional subjects and the things they believe to be inert. I say this because he recognizes that the ‘grounding function’ of Nietzsche’s notion of interpretation affords an immediate connection with the will of the cosmos—one that refuses the categorical divisions supposed by ‘traditional Western concepts’ (Del Caro, 2004, 15–16). The ecophilosopher David Skrbina accepts the importance of aphorism 627 in his panpsychic assertion that ‘will to power’ is ‘the ground-source of the flourishing of life generally, and most broadly, as [it is] the force by which all things […] exert their claim on existence’ (Skrbina, 2007, 137).

Outside of Nietzsche’s notes (*Will to Power* was compiled posthumously from his unpublished writing), aphorism 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil* sees Nietzsche making his most explicit case for panpsychism. Its concluding demand for an epistemology that accepts the dissolution of the boundary between inner and outer worlds might also support a performance-led approach to the question of material culture. I say this because it frames objects in terms of an unfolding scenario (wherein all things apparently express themselves in terms which vary according to the things they meet):

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What Nietzsche seems to be suggesting, in the final sentence, is that the erroneous perception of a mind-body divide, and indeed a subject-object split, is fully consistent with the cosmos (as he appreciates it to be will to power alone).
Supposing that nothing else is ‘given’ as real but our world of desires and passions, that we cannot sink or rise to any other ‘reality’ but just that of our impulses—for thinking is only a relation of these impulses to one another—are we not permitted to make the attempt and to ask the question whether this which is ‘given’ does not suffice, by means of our counterparts, for the understanding even of the so-called mechanical (or ‘material’) world? I do not mean as an illusion, a ‘semblance,’ a ‘representation’ (in the Berkeleyan and Schopenhauerian sense), but as possessing the same degree of reality as our emotions themselves—as a more primitive form of the world of emotions, in which everything still lies locked in a mighty unity, which afterwards branches off and develops itself in organic processes (naturally also, refines and debilitates)—as a kind of instinctive life in which all organic functions, including self-regulation, assimilation, nutrition, secretion, and change of matter, are still synthetically united with one another—as a primary form of life?—In the end, it is not only permitted to make this attempt, it is commanded by the conscience of logical method.

(Nietzsche, 2008, 546)

It is significant that I favoured Helen Zimmern’s translation (from around 1906) of Beyond Good and Evil—to the Cambridge rendition, by Judith Norman (from around 2002), that I’ve read in full. Zimmern was a friend of Nietzsche’s and I assumed that her anthropomorphic allusion to a ‘world of emotions’, rather than the Cambridge translation’s more ambivalent ‘world of affect’ (Nietzsche, 2002, 36) was more faithful to the original intention. Norman’s interpretation seemed to alter the emphasis—away from the human being recognizable in the material world, toward the material world being in the human. Nevertheless, I assumed Norman’s retreat from a clear panpsychic appreciation of the aphorism’s meaning, was symptomatic of an institutionalized anxiety about anthropomorphism. This was suggestive to me of an epistemological opportunity for the ideas of panpsychism. On reflection, this optimism itself registered the positive affects of my practice—as it was coming to terms with a tragic idea of fate (to be more fully addressed in the following part): formerly, I might have seen the diminishment of the panpsychic meaning as something of a warning to stay away from its unfashionable topic.

As it was, the aphorism above helped me to speculate on what particular contribution the thesis might make to knowledge, as it helped me recognize the possibility of a mindful engagement with things. Moreover, as I loosely understood that the contribution would recognize ‘mind’ to be an effect of some material culture meeting, I supposed I was aiming for some re-conception of material culture as a

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2 George Berkeley’s philosophy will be introduced in Part 2.3.
scenario—one which accepted the objectification of engaged human subjects (by the thing-side of its event) for the benefit of an engagement with the mutual occurrence of interpreting agencies.

I recognized some precedent for the ambition in the work of Graham Harman, particularly as his philosophy seizes upon the work of Alphonso Lingis to suggest that the human world is always ‘doubled up’ into ‘two basic principles: the other regarded as the nexus of conditioning forces and energies, and the other as sincere or as occupied with the world that surrounds her’ (Harman, 2010, 16). Nevertheless, as my reading of Nietzsche recognized the cosmological significance of the meeting itself, so it diminished the differentiation of the effects. Therein, I supposed that the thing-side of such encounters need not be understood as being any less or more ‘sincere’ (as this seems to recognize something special in a subject’s intention) than the human individual who is ‘occupied with the world’. Moreover, she need not be distinguished from any other’s ‘nexus of conditioning forces’. The broad significance of this was that as it recovered people as things, it recognized that their experiences might provide for some access to the event of material culture. If this could rightly be called anthropomorphic, it would not necessarily be anthropocentric.

2.2.2
Things Themselves are Dancers

The work of Graham Harman operates at the forefront of a contemporary philosophical project that has come to be described as ‘speculative realism’—after the title of a 2007 conference, at Goldsmiths College, which addressed the qualified return of realism in philosophy’s continental tradition (Bryant, Smilka et.al., 2011, 2). Its object-oriented philosophy affirms Kant’s phenomenological proposal of an object as a real efficacious entity that is involved in the perception which belongs to subjects, without ever being available to human senses as it is, in-itself (hence the speculative nature of their reality) (Harman, 2005, 41). Nevertheless, the speculative nature of Harman’s philosophy represents a secular adjustment of Kant’s ideas as it affirms that there is nothing to guarantee the truthfulness of any object-oriented ideas. In this way, he steers away from Kant’s faith in scientific truth: the promise of something real to be had in the midst of its fundamental concealment, rather heralding a ‘Wild West of philosophy to replace the [...] human-centred mandate of contemporary thought’ (Harman, 2005, 95).
As Harman understands that speculation is a philosophical effect that recognizes the transformative nature of object relations, he equally enthuses about the process ideas of Alfred North Whitehead⁸ (Harman, 2005, 82). The outcome of this hybrid of influences is an ontology (i.e. a logic of existing things) that makes a holistic claim even as it supposes that the substantial things (i.e. the matters behind any apparent surface)—which are widely understood as objects—actively hide their essences from any encounters: a withdrawal of one, from the other, being an active effect of any meeting. In other words, things conceal their core from other things, and this capacity for hiding is understood to be a positive and cosmological attribute of individual objects, as they are always engaged in relations (Harman, 2005, 20). This evasion occurs even as things might betray themselves through the apparent constancy that occurs at the single point of intersection between a human subject and their world.

To illuminate his paradoxical idea—of material things as concrete disappearing acts—Harman draws upon the fundamental mystery of a most revered astronomical phenomena: objects, he says, are like black holes inasmuch as they harbour ‘an erupting infernal universe’ within them; moreover they are also protected by a ‘vacuous shield’, from anything that exists on their outside (Harman, 2005, 95). On the face of it, there is nothing in Harman’s exposition of objecthood to conflict with my own research experiences, as on one level it simply supposes that the relations that produce phenomena continue behind the surface of objects. Nevertheless, the philosophical appeals to Kant and Whitehead are significant. I say this because Harman ultimately restates the limits of what is supposed by the former’s faith in transcendence—i.e. the supposed leap of thought which can close the gap between subjects and objects, to come to know things as they actually are (Sokolowski, 2008, 117)—and the latter’s eagerness to significantly distinguish a human being’s subjective experiences from the experiences objects endure:⁹ namely that the issue of conscious human mind should not be conflated with the experience undergone by objects.

⁸ Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) is closely associated with process philosophy. Indeed ‘process philosophy’ is often understood as a catchphrase for his work, and that of his followers. Much like Nietzsche, Whitehead was somewhat at odds with prevalent categorizing ontologies (which build their philosophies on beings as they exist) as he was compelled recognize life in non-biological terms of a ‘striving through which all things endeavour to bring new features to realization’ (Rescher, 2000, 3).

⁹ Whitehead’s term panexperientialism, whilst holistic, pointedly avoids any reference to ‘psyche’. In this sense it seems to afford a differentiation between the experiences that objects might have and a human’s experience of their own mind. This is to say that it seems to hold the door ajar for an ontological chasm, even if it does not affirm it (Griffin, 2009). Nietzsche’s emphasis on a single cosmological cause (i.e. will to power) would seem to render any
Harman’s explicit refusal of panpsychic ideas, of object minds, might be anticipated by his general tendency to build his speculations upon existing things. This supposes some philosophical primacy for the question of what exists, over and above the potentially more penetrating question of how do existing things come about. I accept that there is much legitimate slippage here, nevertheless his object-oriented foundation perhaps means he never has to face the philosophical challenge of a cosmological oneness—which supposes that the essence of reality lies in the actual flow of matter, rather than the particulars of its affecting forms. In other words, as Harman begins by alighting upon ephemeral things in their effective determination of a moment, their object-dissolving status as outcomes of past events is eclipsed. This is to say that separate forms are apparently understood to be constitutive of reality, existing ‘in utter isolation from all others’ even as they are recognized to be harbingers of future change (Harman, 2005, 1). Given this level of faith in entities, different experiences can affirm the reality of different things. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Harman’s thoughts on panpsychism recall the disparaging views of scientists (Mathews, 2003, 1)—even as his vision of active objects similarly accepts a churning reality of object interactions and experiences which proceed without the intervention of the human mind:

[Panpsychic] doctrines are now wildly out of fashion, and are generally exiled to the wastelands and gullies of the philosophical world, the eternal homeland of [...] unemployable cranks [...] the theory actually preserves the central problem of human-centred philosophy: namely, it still assumes that cognition is something so poignantly special that ontology cannot live without it.

(Harman, 2005, 242)

To my way of thinking, Harman’s position seems predisposed to protect the idea of the human individual, as it is also too ready to assume that the panpsychic perspective sees mind as something special. Mind, understood as an effect of process interactions (rather than the origin of experience), could readily be associated with the chemistry of a universe becoming. The point is encapsulated by Nietzsche in Zarathustra, particularly as Book III has the sage’s animals encapsulating his wisdom by saying ‘to those who think like us, things all dance themselves: they come and hold out the hand and laugh and flee [...]’ (Nietzsche, 1997, 211). If this summarizes Zarathustra’s supposed differentiations as anthropocentric and superficial. In this sense it rather closes the door on ontological chasms.
recognition of the eternal return (*i.e.* the notion that the infinite churning of the
universe’s finite matter anticipates an infinite repetition of forms, and their relations),
then it also accepts that objects, in some sense (analogous with mind) ‘enjoy’ a
centring effect of the drives and allures (*i.e.* a dialogical and relational issue of
scenarios, as it is experienced as intention) that is constituted by the comings and
goings of the becoming cosmos, playing itself out.

**2.2.3**

**Stretched Minds**

As I have suggested, it seems to me that the issue of panpsychism seems increasingly
compelling the less one invests in the local issue of individual entities. Given that his
ontology begins with the question of what exists, it is then unsurprising that
panpsychism is rejected by Harman—particularly as his thesis is that atomizing
Western perceptions, which produce natural science’s object inventories, can yield
cosmological answers (Harman, 2005, 9–10). Harman’s ontology tends to position
being as decisive of reality; given this, objects—as they represent the end of a human
self, through their apparent challenge—tend to determine his perspective. As this
allows things to become decisive of reality, and not simply effects of it, I would suggest
that differences of the fragmenting, scientific, categorical order are allowed some
claims on reality, which can seem questionable when coming from the context of a
changing cosmological whole. From Harman’s perspective, then, the sentience that is
used to determine the existence of objects also determines the cognitive subject, in a
way that seems to be understood to be fundamental rather than incidental. What a
cosmological process perspective would appreciate as an effect would, then, tend to
be conceived as something essential and causal by Harman.

The process by which mind comes to be understood as a human possession is
vividly by communicated by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Moreover, as the
book’s style of articulation works to conspicuously foreground a reader’s own sense of
self (through a steadfast challenge to it), it resists a Western sense of self-hood to make
the relational production of its subject sensuously conspicuous (*i.e.* apparent as an
embodied feeling).

Every instinct which does not vent itself externally *turns inwards*—this is what I call the
internalization of man: it is at this point that what is later called the ‘soul’ first develops in
man. The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly [...] acquired depth, breadth, and
height in proportion as the external venting of human instinct has been inhibited [...] ‘man’ rubs himself raw on the bars of his cage.

(Nietzsche, 1998, 65)

While Harman seems to understand panpsychism to be an idea that is rooted in the egotistical subject’s selfishness, as it identifies objects in terms of its own world, Nietzsche points out that if the selfishness of the perspective is contained in a cosmological whole, the parallel can be illuminating of things, and provide for some access to them. Indeed the panpsychic aspects of *Zarathustra* recover the notion from the ‘outlandish’ territory allocated for it by Harman, as it arguably frames it as a logical extension of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. This might be best represented in the protagonist’s recognition of his own love of dance in the flitting about of a soap bubble (Nietzsche, 1997, 37), particularly as it reverses a familiar, self-centred, act of anthropomorphism (which might say: the soap bubble is like me), to suppose that whatever is acting in the movement of the spritely sphere also acts in his own gambolling.

*Zarathustra’s* qualified return of what makes us human to a world of ‘inert’ objects also occurs when Nietzsche reflects on the apparent impenetrability of a stone: as this allures Zarathustra, through presenting some resistance to his will, so the process of attraction is represented in terms of a mutuality which sees Zarathustra’s own intention reflected in the rock as it is assumed to share his will to bear upon the unfolding strength/drive of another:

 [...] my fervent creative will; thus impelleth it the hammer to the stone.

Ah, ye men, within the stone slumbereth an image for me, the image of my visions! Ah, that it should slumber in the hardest, ugliest stone!

(Nietzsche, 1997, 84)

What Zarathustra might philosophically demonstrate, then, is a logically viable alternative to the anthropocentric variety of panpsychism identified (as defining) by Harman.
2.2.3

Human Limits

In his book *Alien Phenomenology* (2012), Ian Bogost recognizes the emergence of a ‘posthuman’ sensibility, which is coming to define a fresh agenda within the humanities (Bogost, 2012, 6–). Bogost frames this mood as a resistance to anthropocentricity inasmuch as it tries to compel people to recognize worlds that occur—or could occur—without the fleshy matter of human beings. In this sense, Bogost supposes that the tendency can be distinguished from a presently pervasive idea of the ‘post-human’ as this relates to a particular (if related) discourse, which is concerned with issues surrounding the displacement of human organs by prosthetic technology.

Bogost notes that the influential, and presently established, discursive forms of posthumanism typically frame any subject matter (and he uses the study of trees in environmental philosophy, as an example) in terms of the importance for a human future (Bogost, 2012, 7). In this sense, he supposes that the tendency has yet to fully realize its broad promise to reframe people as nothing special: posthumanism, he says, ‘is not [as yet] posthuman enough’ (Bogost, 2012, 8). Nevertheless, he also stresses that a proposed posthuman ideal ought not to discount humans, as it must deliver a holistic approach that accepts ‘we ourselves are of the world as much as musket buckshot and gypsum’ (Bogost, 2012, 8).

I would suggest that as Graham Harman’s work comes with a level of prejudice, against panpsychism, it never really seizes upon the involvement of people in the process of the earth in terms of its possibility. Nevertheless Bogost’s vision of a posthuman future takes heart from the general principle of Harman’s speculative approach; he suggests that its institution in the humanities would offer, and perhaps demand, some opportunity for projects that seek to move forward with ‘outlandish’ ideas such as panpsychism—even as its object-oriented philosophy might express some anxieties about the human mind:

Fleeing from the dank halls of the mind’s prison toward the grassy meadows of the material world, speculative realism must […] make good on the first term of its epithet: metaphysics need not seek verification, whether from experience, physics, mathematics, formal logic, or

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10 Whilst Bogost criticizes a focus on “‘familiar’ actants’, such as dogs, he supposes that the emergence of animal studies might represent something of this posthuman mood.

11 This discourse might be identified with the influence of Donna Haraway’s image of the cyborg (Harraway, 1991, 149–181).
even reason. The successful invasion of realist speculation ends the reigns of both transcendent insight and subjective incarceration.

(Bogost, 2012, 5)

Moreover, if it is accepted (as Bogost supposes) that to be posthuman demands the pursuit of understandings which do not suppose that people are special, then I would suggest that the annexing of subjectivity (i.e. the attempt to put it to one side of the discourse around things) might restate the present problem of human specialness, as it also misses the readiest opportunity to identify with things.

In the opening to his book, Panpsychism in the West, David Skribina presents a compelling argument for entertaining the controversial idea (of panpsychism): whilst it might be true that mind is distinct from the matter of things, no one contemporary philosopher or scientist can give a plausible account of how or why this might be (Skribina, 2007, 1). Moreover, he shares my thinking that the contemporary philosophical attitude, which resists it, tends to re-state a problem of anthropocentricity, which it often says it wishes to overcome. He supposes that this paradox comes after questionable transcendental assumptions which continue to determine an attitude to material things: the first being that mind and cognition are identical; the second being that mind is restricted to ‘higher’ animals; the third being that mind can be identified with the matter of such animals’ brains—as this is, somehow, ontologically distinct from the matter of objects (Skrbina, 2007, 1–2).

I would suggest that the transcendental nature of these defaults can be glimpsed in the work of a notable influence in the posthuman tendency, described by Bogost. In his book Re-assembling the Social (2005) Bruno Latour stresses (quite suddenly, and without giving any reason) that his vision of objects as actants does not support the establishment of, what he describes as, an ‘absurd “symmetry between humans and non-humans”’. There are lines, he says, we should simply never cross. Period (Latour, 2005, 76).

However, while my experiences—registered in the preceding chapters—gave me cause to dispute this. I nevertheless accept a problem that would seem to justify Latour’s taboo—namely that a changing epistemological content can leave the authoritarian mode of Western perception itself untouched. This is to say that people and objects can be ontologically levelled, in someone’s understanding, without this knowledge significantly impacting upon the mode of their own perception. In other words, a changing subject matter need not bring the matter of the perceiving subject
reflexively into question so that it troubles the sense of self. Whilst the practice that followed the work with the Coke can primarily worked of the behalf of my own acceptance of panpsychism it nevertheless helped me to identify a vision of materiality that proved useful for making an appropriate subjective challenge. The particular vision (which tried to negotiate the perceived problem of the judging ego) as it amounts to seeing a look or gaze itself, was that associated with the experience of cinema. This appreciation anticipated Part 3.2, as it visits early cinema in its critical address of its own new media: a process which toyed with the affecting possibilities of its own interface.

12 As Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment sees its protagonist, Raskolnikov, commit a murder that is associated with a process of ontological levelling (the victim being understood to be no more than an insect), it might explain something of Latour’s concern (Dostoyevsky, 2006, 626). In his book, The Outsider, Colin Wilson notes that Raskolnikov’s redemption comes after his recognition that his own perspectives represented a continuum of the very problem (of selfish outlooks) that he supposed his criminal actions were overcoming (Wilson, 1997, 166). The problem of perpetuating a questionable outlook, in the moment of its recognition, is addressed in Zarathustra (arguably in terms which extend to the ‘criminal’ judgement of Raskolnikov, in Crime and Punishment), in the chapter entitled ‘The Pale Criminal’ (Nietzsche, 1997, 34–35).
2.3
Changing Perceptions

2.3.1
Wandering Mind

In Part 1.1, I documented how my research process at least partly occurred through eventful walks on Dartmoor. As these jaunts grew in their distance, through the duration of my research, so they also began to take in a greater diversity of environments and perceptual experiences. The excursions are recalled again, here, because as they continued to progress the research, they also allowed me to register, and respond to, the development of my own changing outlook.

I might suggest that it was the uprightness of trees, along with their attractive provision of shelter and firewood, which first made them ready associations that enriched my journeying. Further to the Real Thing project, this kinship began to extend to occasional conversations that occurred at the level of self-conscious whispers—which made me aware of an anxiety about other people, and their perception of my own outlook (even as I accepted that my seclusion was a pre-condition of the hushed exchanges). Yet if the bearing of a human world was understood to be largely negative, the affecting impact on the volume of my conversations had a positive outcome: it made me conscious of the air that the trees and I were sharing. As this awareness informed the content of my clandestine conversations so it clarified my vision of process, and its panpsychic effects, to my own mind.

The breathy tones helped to overcome an understanding of the tree’s interpretation, of me, which seemed rooted in my own familiar subjectivity. I say this because, in identifying with the tree, there was nevertheless a pressing and problematic temptation
to extend the anthropomorphic process (which had positively encouraged the discourse) to a familiar social (i.e. anthropocentric) exchange. This threatened to stall the project as I would be tempted to reconcile the tree’s interpreting with my own subjective gaze, and my own linguistic processes—as they were disposed to recognizing the primacy of beings. But as my ensuing embarrassment determined a more hushed delivery, so its careful work with the medium of air began to check an anthropocentric influence, by returning me back to a more holistic, and personally convincing, research perspective. To expand, the hushed breathy conversation helped me to recognize that my own seeing was supported by the air that I was inhaling and exhaling as I talked with it. It refused any independent model of visual interpretation as it made a pneumatic support system apparent. Moreover, it helped me to appreciate that my interpretive processes produced the carbon dioxide which supported the tree’s own production of the oxygen I was using (through its process of photosynthesis). Given this, I could indeed affirm that the chatter with the tree did involve a process of mutual interpretation, which was helping each of us to flourish.

2.3.2 Ancient Precedents

Whilst it was composed around 370 BC, Plato’s *Phaedrus* nevertheless anticipates something of modern philosophy’s anthropocentric attitude. The account opens with its protagonists, Socrates and Phaedrus, entering a sparsely populated rural scene, wherein the former seems to be at something of a loss. If his subsequent deferral to the local knowledge of Phaedrus allows the teacher to flatter his student, it also allows him to explain that as a ‘lover of knowledge’ his satisfaction comes from the city ‘and not the trees or the country’ (Plato, 2006, 31). However, the humanist cogitation of Socrates comes to be framed in its increasing tension with more sensual relations, as Socrates is documented in his succumbing to the pleasures afforded by the secluded greenery (in both its naïve and pastoral varieties): reclining—in the shade of a plane-tree—to receive the thoughts of Phaedrus, the head of the philosopher symbolically yields to the cushioning affects of the grass, and he likens himself to ‘a hungry cow before whom a bough […] is waved’ (Plato, 2006, 32).

Apparently seduced, the philosopher’s interest in the Athenian world relents and he soon assumes something of a less rational, Dionysian, perspective—typical of his philosophical predecessors—as he affirms that a single soul may pass through many forms (Plato, 2006, 41). Moreover, he begins to conflict with his purely civic ambition
when he challenges his student’s fascination with individual personalities by redeeming the wisdom of an ancient tradition—within which objects such as trees, and stones, were appreciated in their capacity for good council:

The men of old, unlike in their simplicity to young philosophy, deemed that if they heard truth even from “oak or rock,” it was enough for them; whereas you seem to consider not whether a thing is or is not true, but who the speaker is and from what country the tale comes.

(Plato, 2006, 67)

The rural rumination of Socrates, together with a swelling sexual undercurrent, is accommodated, and significantly overseen, by the plane-tree throughout. This comes to affirm the earthly verity of the trees at Dodona—and something of the tree’s identification with a reader—as its foliage is accepted to harbour cicadas, or grasshoppers (Plato, 2006, 29). These are understood to be nature spirits and they seem to take Socrates beyond his rational self, as their musical accompaniment also returns the scene to the stage of tragedy, the qualified level of impiety in the philosopher’s seductive musings also guaranteeing his death (Hunter, 2012, 134–136).

If The Phaedrus is recalled for its tentative sympathy with the panpsychic perspectives which this part begins to institute, then a particular role—for the production of this thesis—lies in its capacity to foreground and address the problems (as much as the need and the joy) of changing perceptions, whether that be one’s own or a way of seeing that might be said to belong to a given community. In one sense, then, its conflation of wisdom with wood is presented as a paradigm of philosophical understatement more than a startling revision of objects. This anticipates, informs and explains something of my own approach—toward the integration of art process and material culture studies—as it seems to negotiate any negativity by presenting its most fateful challenges through pastoral models. These poetically implicate ostensibly innocent trees (and stones) as their human counterparts trespass into unorthodox or abandoned philosophical territory.

2.3.3
The Sound of a Tree
Graham Parkes has suggested that the animated fauna of the Phaedrus reappears in Western philosophy, in Book IV of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra (Parkes, 1994, 180).
Nevertheless, Edward F. Little maintains that a tree anticipated by Bishop George Berkeley remains the definitive ‘symbol of ultimate [...] questions’ in Western metaphysics (Little, 2002, back-matter); Berkeley’s tree is recalled, here, because it anticipates the (contested) subject-centred phenomenological approach to material culture, which continues to shape its discourse within 21st century humanities (a point accepted in Karlsson, 2005, 29–42). It also explains the insisting precepts behind Graham Harman’s resistance to panpsychism (i.e. as it is sustained by the assumption of an unbridgeable qualitative difference between mind and the matter of objects). The forthcoming examination, then, is intended to challenge this way of philosophical thinking by drawing some attention to a transcendental format—which is presupposed by Berkeley’s proto-phenomenology, even as it represents Western philosophy in the moment it rebels against ‘the domination of medieval theology’ (Little, 2002, 1).

The well-known philosophical question, initiated by George Berkeley, asks if a tree falls in a forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? But if this riddle is ubiquitous then, for longer than I can remember, I have nevertheless wrestled with something of its conundrum in the form of an unintended misrepresentation which rather asked: if a tree falls in a forest, and no one is around to hear it, has a tree actually fallen? I might usefully further the thesis, and redeem my mistake, by considering the tree problem in terms of its changing complexity. If this involves some introduction to the logical particulars which continue to have us apart from matter—particularly in the moment of our epistemological engagement with objects—then the pursuit of its changes foregrounds the lively possibilities of communication, as it represents a well-known problem in both its struggle to contain concepts, and determine a perceptual default. In this sense, it also shares something of how the meeting of minds can bequeath ideas an apparent life of their own (an effect which I put to work, on the behalf of process perspectives, in the creative project described in the Part 2.3.4).

As I have suggested, a popular consensus attributes the question of the falling tree (as it amounts to a philosophical symbol) to the Anglican Bishop, George Berkeley (1685–1783). However, only approximations of the problem exist in Berkeley’s written works. A first analogue occurs in his 1710 Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge. Berkeley remarks:
The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived; the trees therefore are in the
garden, or the chairs in the parlour, no longer than while there is somebody by to perceive
them. Upon shutting my eyes all furniture in the room is reduced to nothing.

(Berkeley, 2008, 48)

As Berkeley revisits the theme of his Treatise through a 1713 revision, in the form of
Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, he evokes the riddle first through the
Hylas’s ‘thinking of a tree in a solitary place, where no one was present to see it’
(Berkeley, 2010, 40) and then through a gardener’s assertion that a ‘cherry-tree exists
in the garden […], because he sees it and feels it’ (Berkeley, 2010, 81).

Reviewed in context, it is clear that Berkeley’s questioning comes after the notion—
contested in Part One of this thesis—that the observer might be able to vindicate things
as they are in-themselves. His philosophical achievement then, is to foreground the
issue of perception as it holds into question the relation of the tree-thing to the object
we appreciate through perception. What he supposes—anticipating something of the
science-fiction of the 1999 movie, The Matrix (dir. Wachowski bros.)—is the possibility
that the tree is an internal creation, independent of any exterior tree materials, even as
its generation comes through some stimulation that might be exterior (but could, in
principle, be simulated). In essence, Berkeley raises the possibility that objects of
knowledge are always—and only—our own perceptual systems. As my own ‘faulty’
revision seized on this as a catastrophe for exteriority itself, it perhaps foregrounded my
own dualistic perceptual instinct, as it was disposed to think in divisive terms of this or
that (it being apparently ill-equipped to loiter in the middle, where there was
apparently no-thing).

If my position effected a mirror image of scientific realism, by affirming the
concreteness of mind rather than exterior things, then it might also be indicative of
what B. Alan Wallace describes as Western epistemology’s disturbing relationship with
Cheshire cats. This recalls Lewis Caroll’s Alice in Wonderland, and a tree which was
haunted by the grin of an animal which had disappeared (Wallace, 1989, 100).
Nevertheless, in the academy of 18th century Britain the faith in the cat could be
restored and any confrontation with the apparent absurdity (recognized by Wallace)
could be held in some abeyance by a faith in transcendental logic. This was
maintained as a perceptual precept even by atheist minds. The Judeo-Christian basis of
the perspective was conceded in Ronald Knox’s lyrical attempt to be adequate to both
the test and the outcome of Berkeley’s ruminations:
There once was a man who said ‘God
Must find it exceedingly odd
When he sees that this tree Continues to be
When there’s no one about in the quad.’

‘Dear Sir, Your astonishment’s odd;
I am always about in the quad—
And that’s why the tree
Continues to be
Since observed by, yours faithfully, God.’

(Knox cited in Caws, 1993, 335)

Knox acknowledges that challenge of Berkeley’s tree was overcome in a Cartesian fashion (Descartes’ doubt being relieved by his faith in God) that reified the perceiving subject, albeit through an induction which depended upon the biblical logics that have people as the image of God. This didn’t mean that the world of science was not solipsistic, rather it allowed modernity to progress with an authority which negotiated the problem’s threat to its project (which was, arguably, to establish the subject as the centre of experience), and its claim on truth. The latter was affirmed through both the inevitability and verity of its subjective idealism—as this made the exterior earth identical with a the apparent interiority of a human subject.

In brief, Berkeley’s point was that if the world was simply made up of effects then it was nevertheless due to effective objects. Both subject and object were thus guaranteed by a transcendental logic. The enduring challenge of Berkeley’s problem, identified by B. Alan Wallace, draws attention to the way that my own ruminations were keeping hold of the same satisfaction with a sense of self, even as that subjectivity doubted the object. But if Berkeley’s position is to be entertained without God, this actually means entertaining effects alone.

Returning to Berkeley’s Three Dialogues, this model might demand some consideration of the challenge of Philonous ‘to conceive of a tree existing without the mind’ in terms of interpretation alone, wherein tree mindfulness is an effect born of an encounter rather than the singular production of a substantial mind. Mind, then, is an effect of the tree. Moreover, without the guarantee of God’s hierarchy—and in accordance with the Lacanian model introduced in Part 1.2—the tree is no less realizing itself by interpreting us, albeit in some inaccessible way. Given that in this
model human sentience is an effect of people meeting other material configurations, it is impossible to limit mind either to the ostensible inners of a brain, its memory effects, or the subjective experience of it. In this sense, it is indeed impossible to conceive of a tree without a mind as there is an exterior mindfulness in the meeting of a tree. Moreover, given that mind might be identified with the effects of meeting and so its affecting things, it might be considered as something omnipresent, manifolding and productively at work with or without a human subject. To return to the assertion of Graham Parkes, which opens this section, this supposition is accepted in Zarathustra, as it reintroduces the lively tree of the Phaedrus through a conversation which is accepted to happily unfold even as the protagonist sleeps (Nietzsche, 1997, 266).

2.3.4

Back to the View

Zarathustra’s panpsychic tree seems to make a cameo appearance in Nietzsche’s subsequent book Beyond Good and Evil (2002). In aphorism 192 of the latter, Nietzsche anticipates phenomenology as he advocates an object engagement that occurs without recourse to the references that organize human worlds:

[O]ur senses greet everything novel with reluctance and hostility; and affects like fear, love, and hate, as well as the passive affects of laziness, will be dominant during even the ‘simplest’ processes of sensibility.—Just as little as today’s reader takes in all the individual words […] on a page—just as little do we see a tree precisely and completely, with respect to leaves, branches, colors, and shape.

(Nietzsche, 2002, 82)

In his paper for the 2009 conference, ‘Nietzsche on Mind and Nature’, Graham Parkes affirms that Nietzsche seems to be providing some template, here, for Edmund Husserl’s pioneering phenomenological process of ‘bracketing’ (Parkes, 2009, online). This amounts to a focused perceptual engagement with objects, which he suggests neutralizes the distracting influence of human worlds and world-beliefs (Sokolowski, 2008, 64). Nevertheless, Parkes recognizes that as Nietzsche vies to access (rather than simply experience) the nature of the object through the bracketed format, so he empties the subject—that is central to much phenomenology—of any philosophical significance. In brief, what’s important is the moment as it is constituted through
different points of view and constitutive of them. Drawing from Nietzsche’s *nachlass*, Parkes describes this in terms of a process that procures ‘the advantages of one who is dead’ because it displaces sentient recognition with its raw ‘will to power’. This amounts to the experience of ‘force [bearing] against force’ (Parkes, 2009, online).

Given that I had accepted that I was somewhat predisposed to a subject-centred outlook, I recognized my own need to begin nurturing the advantages of the dead. An opportunity for this came, again, during one of my jaunts through Devon: whilst walking through a wood in Buckfast, I spotted a dead leaf that appeared to be mysteriously suspended in mid-air. I found myself arrested in a moment as I became frustrated at myself for not carrying my camera with me (something I had promised myself to do all the time)—so I could record the moment of apparent magic. The hesitation proved fateful as it afforded an instant that allowed me to recognize the beginning of an impulsive move towards the ‘floating’ leaf, before I fully acted on it. I resolved to harness the haste, and use it to propel me back home for my camera, by looking at the leaf no further. As this refused me my own satisfaction, so its energy sustained my journey home and then back.

The trek back to my house offered some time for a critical reflection. Having resolved to keep the impulsive feeling happening, by looking no further before returning home for my camera, so its journey promised to work as a method for appreciating its (underdetermined) thing in terms of a pure intention. With the aim of having a perspective on an object succeeded by its own intentional drive, the delay allowed me to make a decision: beyond interventions required for filming (as this included the provision of a book, to provide a contrasting background) I would look at the leaf no further. In the event, this involved turning my back on the view as soon as the camera started to record it.

As I returned back home with my recording, I found that the object of my impulse became the video document itself, as much as the event that it ‘captured’. Indeed, given that I had seen something of the subject matter but nothing of its video, the latter became more effective in terms of keeping the significant impulse (to determine the object) happening. Given this, I resolved to see nothing of the tape as I identified the impulsive feeling with a recognizable experience of will to power’s cosmological force. Aphorism 480 of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* suggests that the desire to know is an expression of the basis of human being, it amounting to a mode of will to power—one

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13 *Nachlass* is a German term that refers to the writings left behind when an author dies.
through which humankind prospers as it represents a ‘regularity of its perceptions’ which can come to master reality and ‘press it into service’ (Nietzsche, 1968, 266–267). In The Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche recognizes my feeling of frustration as he associates the process of coming to know the unknown with ‘a relief […] and a satisfaction’ that ‘produces a feeling of power’ (Nietzsche, 2007, 33). By prohibiting myself from viewing the video this gratification was thwarted and my will to know was experienced as pent-up force—inflaming a feeling of curiosity and making its energy conspicuous to myself.

I entitled this project—as it amounted to an exercise intended to keep a cosmological force apparent to my mind—Le\textsuperscript{f}. The appeal to the phonetic alphabet (the hour glass symbol extends the prior vowel sound) recognized that even as I would be obliged to register the leaf recording, in the writing for the thesis, it primarily represented (for me) a sound, which had me going through the feeling of the absent (‘without leaf’) reference. This video is available for viewing on DVD 2.

Over a period of weeks, the video recording posed a question: what was it that I did and did not have? There was certainly the tape object, and there was something of the underdetermined leaf performance. There was also something else; namely the unseen document which—having never been seen—was eclipsing the significance of the leaf in its capacity to keep the impulse behind the object happening. However, its status as a recording fully under my own control meant that it became something of a subjective idea, more than an unseen thing. This threatened its capacity to stir the searching feeling which I associated with the cosmological drive of process.

To negotiate the work’s perceived vulnerability to some idea that I might be making something that was of the order of an esoteric artefact (as that accepts the concept as much as the footage)—rather than realizing a method of cognitively coming to terms with the exoteric force of process—I made a decision to show the video document. This display occurred with little fanfare at a Theoretical Archeaology Group (TAG) conference (at Bristol University, in December 2010)—where the video provided a projected ‘backdrop’ (though I stood somewhat to the side of the screen and not directly in front of it) for a conference paper that advocated a higher profile for Nietzsche, in the field of material culture studies.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} The creation of the displayed Quicktime video (identical to the movie on DVD 2) was completed with the assistance of my wife. This helped me to overcome the dreadful possibility of actually seeing the document I had created.
The procedure of showing the video freed its work up from a conceptual grip that threatened to choke its capacity to help me recognize a cosmological force happening. I say this because it realized the work as a visual event. Moreover, the process of having the work seen, without any explicit context (the video had no introduction), escalated the pursued effect. To expand, I understood that the display of its mysterious images might be a precursor to some objectification of the visual content, with outcomes that I could not anticipate. Nevertheless, I suspected that some objectification had happened: I watched the audience as I delivered my paper, and if reactions at the end varied from head shaking frustration to a more relaxed satisfaction, there was a recognizable change of look and repose. As this perceived change suggested that the audience had been affected by what they had seen, it also had me speculating upon the viewing subjects and on-screen objects that could have been secured and/or altered through the display. In this sense, the unseens of the footage became less significant than the affecting issue of its playback for people. If, then, my subsequent response to interrogation recalled the ‘what you see is what you get’ art cliché (explained in section vii of my introduction) it was not to celebrate the primacy of human subjectivity, but rather to keep my own subjectivity at bay by adding a plural dimension to the platitude—as it was revisited as an open question. To expand, this apparent pluralizing prevented me from making any idea concrete as it accepted that the unknown but understandable objectifications of the audience(s) had now laid some claims on the footage.

After speculating on a manifold of possible audience perspectives, I recognized that on this occasion my ability to pre-empt the content of other human minds was limited. Thereafter, I came to the decision that my research ought to proceed with an understanding that my representation of the Western(ized) human subject should be framed as an issue of manner alone (i.e. the subject-object way of seeing). This strengthened my relationship with performance (and panpsychism) as I resolved to make the modality of object perceptions more important for the thesis than particular object outcomes. It also negotiated some anxieties I had about my rather private approach to art-making, as it provided a basis for intervening in social worlds without being troubled by potential disparities and contests which might occur if I continued to dwell on particulars such as Coke cans (as their meanings might deviate according to their context).

Nevertheless, as Let’s extension into a public realm primarily engaged the objectifying process of human subjects (as much as things) it provided for an affecting
work. Particularly as the work harnessed the perceptual outlooks of other people to revive and intensify a personally affecting (and private) performance piece that had me reflecting on myself as an expression of cosmological force, rather than a self-contained harbinger of the authority associated with ‘cold’ observation. Thereafter, and perhaps in some recognition that the oneness of process amounted to an economy, I turned my attention to the task of placing other people in touch with process. As I identified this work with the traditional role of the shaman I turned to my own affecting guide, Nietzsche, to help me understand this role; Part 3.1 represents this process. However, I do not expect that the direct influence of LeF on the research will be recognized until Part 3.2. This chapter sees me initiating an engagement with the magical and healing possibilities of the cinematic interface. Its work was somewhat directed by the reading which informed its predecessor (i.e. Part 3.1), but the broad interest in cinema—which it reflects—was piqued by LeF after the latter had me pondering an apparent conflict between movie experiences at my local Odeon, which seemed to anticipate the my gaze, and my speculations about the assumed plurality of objects that had been seen by viewers of my leaf video.
Part Three
3.0.1

Overview

This part discusses a pause in my practice to critically engage with the issue of shamanism. The general interest in communal healing came after my appreciation that the integration of process, into any anthropocentric context, must manage the difficult task of both accommodating and affecting the subjective gaze.

The perceived challenge accepts the holistic obligations of process, and my research recognition of a risk that comes with one logic of process—that is its ontological levelling (of subjects and objects) as it might become something of a nihilistic judgement when it is exercised in the mind of a resistant, and so unaffected, subject (a danger acknowledged in Part 2.2.4). As Part 3.1 shares my understanding that this tension between subjects and process was recognized in the traditional role of the shaman (as he or she met the challenge of healing a rift with the wider environment in a fashion that nevertheless recognized social sensibilities), it also accepts my need to learn from—as much as through—its historical precedents (as these could be said to include Nietzsche).

The part’s growing focus on cinema’s silent clowns, and Buster Keaton in particular, comes after the research documented in Part 2.3.4. If this registered a tentative move towards involving subjects, in an affecting process project, then its use of video usefully recognized the subjective gaze in its possibility as much as its expected certainty (i.e. I was sure objective perspectives of the leaf video were coming about, in an audience, and yet their particulars were open to speculation). Given that this ambivalence usefully helped me to foreground that all subjects ‘come about’ through the process of affect, it also had me recalling the transformative magic of some vintage slapstick cinema—which significantly occurred with a protagonist’s knowing gaze back at the audience. This anticipated this part’s wider research significance, as it exposes the shaman’s purpose in, and through, the medium of cinema. As this comes to recognize the need for (as much as the method of) a modern shaman, it anticipates Part 4.1’s interrogation of the cinematic interface. This will be shown to have a direct bearing on the practice-as-research, which fully resumes in Part 4.2.
3.1

Outlining the Shaman

3.1.1

Building Bridges

The healing capacity of the shaman is shared across a range of cultural contexts, but it remains consistent in its role of perpetuating a sense of oneness with the widest environment through the performance of ritual. Such rites share out something of the shaman’s connected psychic consciousness, they also relieve the anxiety that might stem from any sense of separateness from the earth’s matrix.

If the provision of a healing bridge—to a unified existential economy—defines the role of the shaman, it is nevertheless the subjective outlook of a shaman’s community that determines the style and form of shamanic rites. This point is implied by John Grim, as he notes that the efficacy of such healing performance’s hinges on the shaman’s capacity to recognize, and so engage, the perspectives of his or her society:

[T]he shaman evokes an efficacious power. In a very real sense, it is not the shaman alone or his activities in themselves that are, strictly speaking, religious, but the manner in which the shaman is able to connect the audience to a cosmological power.

(Grim, 1983, 40)

Friedrich Nietzsche’s literary style, as it comes together with his openness to energies of benevolence, allowed him to become my own formative reference for appreciating the conditions of some modern fulfilment of the shaman’s capacity. This understanding emerged through Nietzsche’s earliest literary intervention, The Birth of Tragedy. The book sketches a shamanic earth disciple through its considerations of the ancient Greek gods, Dionysus and Apollo: deities who walked together in the Hellene context, yet
conflicted as the Dionysian realm of a universal willing (an essential life-force, sometimes called *Brahman*\(^1\) in its support of creation) vied with Apollo’s diverse dominion of appearance and form (Nietzsche, 2003, 14–18).

Nietzsche argued that the performance of tragedy, with which the figures of Apollo and Dionysus were synonymous, maintained a civic profile for the inevitable tension between human being (as this determines how the earth’s process might appear, through the lens of our own interested investments) and the cosmological principle of becoming (which can be identified with the earth’s perpetual death and rebirth flux). Nietzsche supposed that the Hellene awareness of this schism benefited the *polis* as it kept its people in touch with their widest role in an inevitable process of change (Nietzsche, 2003, 20–24).

In essence, then, the tragic consciousness worked by mitigating the fragmenting effects of any sense of completion in the self. Whilst this ‘individuation’ serviced a public state of mind—in its identification of material things with particular, culturally significant, objects—its related tendency to assume several ontological spaces between the subjective self and the matter of the wider earth nevertheless risked frustrating community life through its support of independent perspectives and their rationalizations.

Given the perceived emphasis on a generative matrix, Nietzsche understood ancient Greek tragedy to be its civilization’s regulated and aesthetic revision of more primitive Dionysian celebrations—associated with the orgiastic rites of fertility festivals. If tragedy stopped short of the latter’s overwhelming of culturally accepted appearances, it nevertheless diminished their significance as it identified subjects (and so their objects) with the changing and creative matter of the earth’s flow:

Not only is the bond between man and man sealed by the Dionysiac magic: alienated, hostile or subjugated nature, too, celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man. The earth gladly offers up her gifts, and the ferocious creatures of the cliffs and the desert peacefully draw near [...] as if the veil of Maya had been rent and hung in rags before the mysterious primal Oneness.

(Nietzsche, 2003, 17)

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\(^1\) The term *Brahman* has entered the popular vernacular but it originates in Hinduism, where it refers to the divine ground of being (Vrajapraana, 1999, 2).
As *The Birth of Tragedy* visits the tragic subject matter in terms of its healing of individuation’s rifts with the earth, the treatise supposes that Attic drama fulfilled the role of the shaman—the latter similarly reviving some holistic sense of involvement as its rituals confront an audience through trusted appearances, de-familiarised for the memorable invocation of an ineffable life-force. In this sense, Nietzsche’s shamanic understanding of tragedy is distinguishable from the vision of other 19th century literary figures (such as Mary Shelley) who—whilst similarly sceptical about Christianity, and equally interested in tragic effects—nudged its drama further towards transcendental idealism as they continued to understand its essence to lie in critical notions of some ‘fatal flaw’ rather than the affirmation of a whole economy which prevails without error (Bloom, 2010, 12).

### 3.1.2 Magical Synergy

To the extent that *The Birth of Tragedy* seduces its late Romantic intellectual milieu (through its interest in the classical world), only to challenge the legitimacy of its Socratic (*i.e.* rational) underpinnings, it might be understood to begin playing-out the shamanic role that its author, ostensibly, sets out to merely explain. This tentative mystical performance would be more fully realized through Nietzsche’s staggered (and so dramatically ‘staged’) publication of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The latter project confuses the distinction between the literary creation of Zarathustra and his philosophical creator, as it sees each becoming an avatar of the other. If the shamanic aspects of this transformative process are reinforced by the epic narrative—as it is told through an evocative pre-modern parlance—then the implicit becomes explicit when the chapter on ‘Great Events’ has Zarathustra plunging into a volcano (Nietzsche, 1997, 128–131). This story that recalls some of Nietzsche’s previous scholarship which acknowledged the shamanic purpose of the (pre-Socratic) philosopher Empedocles, who undertook a similar plummet into the throat of Mount Aetna (Nietzsche, 2001, 137).

But the spirit of the shaman might inhere most strongly in the affecting experience of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*’s message, as it encourages a perceptual shift away from the anthropocentric transcendence of matter (*i.e.* objects) through nurturing an involving awareness of the magical synergy of encounters: a ‘participation mystique’ (Tucker,

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I might stress that as Nietzsche turns his own reasoning faculties upon this process of reason he cannot be accused of advocating an irrational approach to existence.
1992, xxiii) wherein ‘things all dance themselves’ as they ‘hold out the hand and laugh and flee’ (Nietzsche, 1997, 211). If the experience of the encouraged change in outlook still has the capacity to leave readers of Zarathustra with the feeling that they have succumbed to a mystic’s healing spell, then it also begins to evoke the apparent anarchy of slapstick scenarios as it challenges the idea that material things can be innocent, inert, or passive in events. As this notion services this chapter’s deployment of tragedy, as a lens for revisiting the materiality of early cinematic slapstick (and so the analogue purpose of some of its silent clowns) then the apparent foreshadowing of fresh ideas and themes, in the contemporary material culture project points to the wider interdisciplinary purpose of this exercise.

3.1.3
An Earthly Ego

In his book, Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity, Paul Heelas describes the underlying ambition of modernity as a transformation of the Protagorean contemplation of humankind, as ‘the measure of all things’, into something of an intention to be decisive on the beingness or non-beingness of everything (Heelas, 1998, 61). As this notion conflicts with tragedy’s all-involving idea of a cosmological authority, it allows a glimpse of how the modern project might have continued Christianity’s suppression of the shamanic message. In this sense, Heelas’ understanding of modernity might also assist in distinguishing how a Neo-shaman would have to differ from the traditional archetype, because if the social purpose of the integrated mystic must withstand in any fluctuation on the shamanic theme, then a contemporary equivalent of its healing individual, in any ‘Westernized’ context, would have to be something of an ethical egoist (in pursuing a virtuous cause which nevertheless conflicts with the widely accepted authority of a human world) and so an outsider figure.

I must stress that the apparent egoism of the supposed shamanic figure is not a centred variety—as this would simply act to place the deviant subjectivity at the centre of the project—but rather the lonely inevitability of pursuing the primacy of a process earth in a social milieu that can only recognize the power of humanity. Nevertheless,

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3 This suggestion comes after my own experience of reading the book.

4 I might present the increasing advocacy of ‘material agency’ as some example (see, for instance, Knappett, 2008, 139–156).

5 Such figures might continue to be exemplified by the tribal shamans of the Ojibway Indians (Grim, 1983) and the communal shamans of the Saami culture in Nordic countries (Miller, 2007).
inasmuch as such outsider figures might refuse to yield to an endemic individuated
disposition (even as he or she acts on the behalf of a whole which includes humanity)
then the behaviour of such a healer might be difficult to distinguish from that of a self-
centred egoist—especially to a Western subject who tends to perceive people as social
agents who should affirm the authority of a group (by ‘choosing’ to act in accordance
with the will of its administrative structures).

It was arguably further to reading Nietzsche that Martin Heidegger recognized, and
regretted, the emergence of a subject-centred epoch—which he titles ‘The Age of
World Picture’—wherein ‘man’ has become ‘that being upon which all that is, is
grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth’ (meaning that all ‘matter
stands before us exactly as it stands with it for us’) (Heidegger, 1977, 128–129). And it
is perhaps in his experience, of the powerful auditing that this supposes, that Nietzsches
recognized that those wishing to affect outlooks would well serve their projects by a
pious retreat from the world:

‘[A]udience’ is merely a word, and not a constant, immutable standard. Why should the
artist feel obliged to accommodate himself to a force whose strength lies purely in numbers?
And if he feels superior, in talent and aspiration, to every single spectator, how could he
feel greater respect for the collective expression of all those subordinate capacities than for
that individual spectator who is, in relative terms, the most gifted among them?

(Nietzsche, 2003, 57)

A democratic instinct has, perhaps, left some Western intellectuals unwilling to identify
with Nietzsche’s look down on the many (Brown, 2000, 205). A related level of
suspicion, around the philosopher’s intentions, has arguably combined with his Neo-
pagan and aesthetic associations, to contribute to a popular confusion that has a
shaman’s symbolic power associated with the notoriety of art’s enfant terribles. To
illustrate the endurance of this misapprehension—and to differentiate the shaman’s
earthly ego from a misleading correlate—I might draw on a contrast between the
Surrealist figures of Max Ernst and Salvador Dalí, particularly as art’s popular
commentators have sometimes allowed the latter to be the chief representative the
Surrealist ethos (Ross, 2003, 92).  

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6 I ought to note that Dalí, himself, might have been instrumental in encouraging this alignment,
as he was not shy of comparing his own persona with the philosophical figure of Nietzsche (see,
for example, Dalí, 1998, 21). In the sense that he supposed himself to be a representative of
Surrealism, one might then say that he understood Nietzsche to be a Shaman.
Max Ernst’s interest in alchemy might be said to make him an overt advocate of Surrealism’s shamanic ethos, particularly as he recognized the former’s historical interest in ‘Primal Matter’ (i.e. the immortal stuff which sustains transient forms) was consistent with Shamanic lore’s identification with one death and rebirth process (Warlick, 2001, 13–17). Ernst’s faith in process was given a subjective aspect, as he believed that the affects of fighting in the First World War had amounted to a death for his former self, one which had nevertheless anticipated his rebirth as another (subject). The sentiment was captured in interview when he declared ‘Max Ernst dies the 1st of August 1914. He resuscitated the 11th of November 1918 as a young man aspiring to become a magician and to find the myth of his time’ (Ernst cited in Warlick, 2001, 17). This comfort with flux can be contrasted with Dalí’s concern for his image. Indeed the latter’s pursuit of an instantly recognizable artistic repertoire and public profile would come sustain internal calls for his expulsion from the Surrealist collective (Havard, 2001, 32–33). To expand, Dalí’s stylistic concessions to the canon of fine art were suspected (by founding Surrealist figures such as André Breton) as a circumventing, rather than a furthering, of Surrealism’s shamanic cause. This is because Dalí willfully reproduced and exploited questionable cultural meanings (such as the divisive Western idea of ‘the artist’ which supposes that creativity can be controlled by, or gathered up into, individuals) to afford him his influential celebrity: a socially engaged strategy, for personal power, that conflicted with the holism of Surrealism’s mystical agenda.

3.1.4
Foreign Objects

Book XI of Homer’s Odyssey documents a shaman’s earthly council, in the form of the restorative prophecy of the blind seer Teiresias (a tiding that is recalled once again in book XXIII). As the soothsayer foresees some end to the journeying of Odysseus, his utterance also points to a symbolic moment wherein two distinguishable objects emerge through the form of a single material thing:

> Go forth, carrying with you a balanced oar, till you come to men who know nothing of the sea and eat food unseasoned with salt […]. I will give you a plain token you cannot miss. When another traveller falls in with you and takes the thing upon your shoulder to be a winnowing-fan, then plant that balanced oar in the ground and […] return home […].

(Homer, 1998, 130–131)
Ostensibly, the vision simply anticipates a moment when Odysseus becomes aware of his home through its material culture relations (a consolidating process). However, a shamanic bridge lies in the scenario; particularly as it triggers some awareness that objects, worlds, and the latter’s people, are mutually disclosed as they feed into (and so constitute) cultural complexes through encounters: a healing appreciation which is associated with the open generosity of the earth through the prophecy’s acceptance that—contra the seductive sense of individuation—beings never have any independent existence. This perceived object-lesson seems intimately bound up with the blindness of Teiresias and its affordance of insight, through ignorance, in the context of his dark underworld dwelling (unlike his sighted neighbours, the sage is fundamentally uncompromised by the blackness of Hades). In this sense, the tale further propagates The Odyssey’s positive perception of foreignness as it is more subtly initiated through the drifting figure of Odysseus himself (Naas, 1999, 86).

The healing scenario, of the oar/winnowing fan ambivalence, was something I recognized in my laborious (which is to say protracted and careful, rather than arduous) review of silent slapstick. In Charlie Chaplin’s 1925 film The Gold Rush, for instance, the resourceful tramp allows the leather sole of his shoe to become some surrogate for a rump steak—the humour lying in the scene’s capacity to invoke the harmonizing ontological constancy between the two objects (each coming from a cow), whilst it nevertheless accepts the differences that might be identified through the lens of culture. I will return to something of this scenario in its particular potential for a life affirming experience in Parts 3.2.3 and 3.2.4, but for now I might further illuminate the premise of its humour—as it is dependent on a resourceful existence at the fringes of society—through some recourse to a 20th century account of modernity’s seminal marginalized sages.

As Colin Wilson’s 1956 book, The Outsider, advocates staying foreign, as a way to ‘absolute Brahman, which is supreme and characterless’, it also presents Nietzsche as a modern model of its spiritual logics in action. In doing so, Wilson evokes the inanimate features of Buster Keaton (who began his stage career in 1899, the year before Nietzsche’s death), particularly as the philosopher advances the role of the outsider in terms of his or her challenge to Eurocentric ideas of human being—which are questioned in their cherishment of ideas of character and personality:

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7 This date comes from an anonymously written booklet which accompanies the Eureka Video DVD collection, Buster Keaton: The Complete Short Films 1917–1923 (2011).
Schopenhauer made Nietzsche aware of something that, as a poet and an Outsider, he had subconsciously been aware of for a long time: that the world is not the bourgeois surface it presents. It is will, and its delusion [...].

[…] Outsiders [...] doubt the ‘reality’ of the bourgeois world (I call it this for want of a better word; in practice, I mean the world as it appears to the human social animal). All of the meaning of this attitude is compressed in de L’isle Adam’s ‘As for living, our servants will to that for us’. It means that the human personality is conceived almost as an enemy; when it comes into contact with ‘the world’, it tells the soul lies, lies about itself and its relation to other people.

(Wilson, 1997, 220)

Writing in a subsequent book, From Atlantis to the Sphinx (1996), Wilson identifies the living which de L’isle Adams refuses with a world of technology—wherein behaviour is apparently prescribed by the objects (Wilson, 1996, 277). As an alternative, Wilson advocates living in an ‘eternal present’—which he associates with a Native American ritual and shamanism (Wilson, 1996, 239; 242). Wilson’s description of this way of life had me recalling the resourcefulness of Chaplin and Keaton’s clowning, as it apparently treats encounters with material forms as open affecting events which must be creatively fashioned according to current needs (Wilson, 1996, 239). However, it was Keaton who I came to focus on. I believed he embodied a modern shamanic model, as his signature ‘deadpan’ symbolically effaced his knowing. I also recognized that the critical possibilities, of this apparent erasure, accepted the maintenance of knowledge in the former’s encounters with the wider social milieu. In this sense, the thrill of Keaton’s cinematic performances reminded me that outsider figures remain culturally involved—rather than anti-social or sociopathic.

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8 The ‘delusion’ of will, referred to here, is arguably its fragmenting effect as it is manifest in a human subject’s sense of personal autonomy.
3.2

Visionary Voice / Silent Clown

3.2.1 Distributing the Limelight

Ahead of a review of Buster Keaton movies, at London’s National Film Theatre during the spring of 2006, a BBC News (online) article took a lead from the retrospective to draw wider attention to slapstick’s filmic archive. The item, entitled ‘What Happened to Slapstick?’, remains noteworthy because of the nuanced way that its author, Steve Tomkins, represents Keaton’s clowning. Rather than visiting one of the star’s famously daring stunts he instead highlights a scene from a 1921 short, *The High Sign*, where Keaton apparently confounds an expectation by avoiding, rather than slipping upon, a banana skin. This dodge is completed with an esoteric hand gesture, which is interpreted as communicating that there is ‘more to slapstick than you thought’ (Tomkins, 2006). In the context of the item, it is clear that the journalist is deferring to ideas of type, as he has Keaton thwarting some formulaic prerequisite for the benefit of an unexpectedly sophisticated effect: a supposition that might reflect a widely-held perception of slapstick, as it privileges a generic narrative over any affirmation of a banana presence.

However, if this ostensible non-event is viewed through the Nietzschean lens of tragedy, then the scenario might be reassessed through a serene worldview, which—in reflecting the essential oneness of life’s flux—accepts the inevitable contribution of all things in any given event. I might recall aphorism 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, once again, to emphasize that Nietzsche’s truly vital variety of tragedy not only denies free-will and pure chance, it also accepts ‘inert’ materials as ‘belonging to the same plane of reality as our affects’ (Nietzsche, 2002, 36). In this light, Keaton’s dodge might
represent an experiential appreciation of the banana skin’s active presence, albeit through his negotiation of its agencies and their harmful potential; wherein, the object isn’t neutral, nor is it beholden to a generic staple. Instead, it is a contributor to the skit, and one that lends some knowing artfulness to Keaton’s ‘steer clear’ through its lively unfolding as a slippery thing.

This distributing revision (inasmuch as it accepts the agency of a thing in an event) has Keaton allowing an object to share some of that limelight which commentators (such as Steve Tomkins) tend to throw onto slapstick’s human actors alone. In this sense Tomkins’ apparent confidence, in an anthropocentric reading of the skit, might be representative of a Western subjective outlook. Moreover, it might throw the broad anxiety behind the counter-point—as it finds a contemporary academic champion in the figure of Bruno Latour—into some useful high relief:

Much like sex during the Victorian period, objects are nowhere to be said and everywhere to be felt. They exist, naturally, but they are never given a thought, a social thought. Like humble servants they live on the margins of the social doing most of the work but never allowed to be represented as such. There seems no way, no conduit, no entry point for them to be knitted together with the same wool as the rest of the social ties. The more radical thinkers want to attract attention to humans in the margins and at the periphery, the less they speak of objects. As if a damning curse had been cast unto things, they remain asleep like the servants of some enchanted castle.

(Latour, 2005, 73)

Latour’s subsequent actor-network-theory (ANT) addresses this disparity by considering the social world in terms of the associations between all of its human and non-human ‘actors’ (Latour, 2005, 85). The focus on relations challenges any idea that objects are inert, as the network model makes their input apparent. Graham Harman registers the cosmological implications of this as he describes the notion of social inputs as an expression of a process ‘carpentry’ which allows and expresses the mutual communication that sustains becoming (Harman, 2005, 1–4).

Harman’s philosophical take on ANT is salutary as it foregrounds a participatory logic which highlights that no object is a ‘given’ thing, because what it appears to be depends upon what it meets (Harman, 2005, esp.184). It also makes clear that an object is not an anterior thing because any apparent carpentry of one thing with another will not prohibit the significant activity of either component in further (and perhaps invisible) relationships (Harman, 2005, esp.83). Nevertheless, conventional
ANT (by which I mean ANT as it occurs in the academic context of the social sciences, rather than philosophy) encourages talk about the positive social ‘agency’ of things (Latour, 2005, esp.53); this refers to the way things seem to occur or happen to be objects through their apparently generous (i.e. usefully modifying) activity in human worlds. So, one agency of the ink which forms this writing might be said to be its blackness, but the carpentry model serves to highlight that this agency fits into the contrasting whiteness of paper (and vice versus), and together they recognize the vagaries of the human eye—as the eye also recognizes the ink’s writing. In another analogous and connected network quite different agencies could be apparent. For instance, one might speculate that in the related world of a bookworm, ink’s perceived agency would be its provision for a condiment upon a bland paper meal. However, as Harman’s carpentry idea keeps ANT’s mutuality foregrounded I am compelled to highlight that if a bookworm makes a meal of a book’s paper, then the paper also makes something more of the bookworm: its calories help to make it healthier and stronger, and perhaps the ink is carcinogenic and simultaneously changing of body-mass of the creature in a different biological way.

ANT has provided a ready lens for some 21st century material culture projects. The idea of macro social networks has been particularly useful in helping researchers to track the historical movements of people through its capacity for detailed models of cultural transmissions (see Stark et al., 2008, passim). Moreover, its underpinning notion of human and non-human hybrids—which occur as people and objects fold into each other—has extended the reach of performance studies’ interest in participatory activity through highlighting a level of equivalence between people and things. Yet, if ANT has returned the energy of objects, back into models of the social (through defying any idea of pure or individuated form), it falls short of tragedy’s holistic promise, even as it has reawakened elements of the material culture discipline to some epistemological need to commune with the process earth (see Knappett, 2005, 11–34).

Having highlighted a perceived limitation, I might suggest that ANT’s level of cosmological promise is prematurely curtailed by the way that its material forces are framed in terms of some useful end. Thereafter things themselves tend to be submerged as the labour that weaves beings into useful networks becomes definitive of their objects. If this satisfies something of the agnostic demands of tragedy (by refusing the anthropocentric idea of agency) then it tends to leave things acknowledged in terms of the sublimated state(s) that are consistent with particular cultural interests. Nevertheless, in its implication of transformative meetings, ANT usefully implicates a
field of synergy that can be readily identified with the shaman’s quarry. I say this because as ANT invites a focus on one mutually affecting event, it arguably provides for a microscopic encounter with the process chemistry of the changing cosmos.

3.2.2
As Large as Life

Any given network tends to put only some of a material thing’s doing to work and so ANT, as a material culture lens, values any subsequent material actors according to how they are disposed to propagating (necessarily) discriminating systems. To explain further, I might invoke my own growing collection of vinyl LPs, where a number of agencies related to the changing durability of their plastic material might rightly be said to be/have been put to work in the networked format (i.e. vinyl as it occurs within the context of the music industry where its softness, when heated, is exploited in pressing and its brittleness at room temperature is put to work for music playback). However, even a generous account of ANT would only negatively accept vinyl’s distinctive smell. This is to say that because it does not smell awful, vinyl is networkable as a domestic entertainment medium. Yet this smell remains a very real, and positive, feature of encounters with my record collection—and no less so in their hi-fi context.

A perceived limitation of ANT, then, is that in being a theory of social effects (which is to say vested outcomes) rather than the affecting presence, it tends to displace a tragic idea of fate with the destiny associated with ‘interested’, technological, relations: useful connections which tend to volatize things and stuff into agreeable qualities alone. This latter process might be understood to represent some practical variant of the tragic view, but any intellectual satisfaction with its model might obscure its inability to oversee and nurture our intimacy with a cosmological matter, as it constitutes the physical events of existence (an engagement which might be said to represent the ethical imperative of tragedy). However, this is scarcely of concern to Bruno Latour, whose interest in any notion of oneness between humans and other beings is restricted to its own usefulness as an analytical device for understanding systems. His articulation of this limit, in Reassembling the Social, has already been shared through the writing in Part 2.2.4, but it is significant enough to justify a fuller citation here:

ANT is not, I repeat is not, the establishment of some absurd ‘symmetry between humans and non-humans’. To be symmetric, for us, simply means not to impose a priori some
spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations. There are divisions one should never try to bypass […].

(Latour, 2005, 76)

Yet the ‘intimacy’, which tragedy nurtures, is based on accord through the fundamental absence of divisions even as it accepts their superficial appearance through networks. From here it might be possible to begin distinguishing a tragic materiality from ANT’s interested and efficient correlate.

3.2.3 Quizzing Matter

A tragic relationship with material things might be understood as an engagement which occurs on the basis of one life-force, as the latter allows all things to bear upon each other, so that they might affect other beings and constitute the creative authority of the earth’s flux. A communion with this force might be realized when its things are engaged outside of the distracting pull of the social horizons that support networks (and subjects). In their process, I might describe the supposed encounters as an attempt to get behind objects, and they might be initiated when people stay foreign to worlds and instead answer any object’s apparent call to us with idiosyncratic responses. If this process accepts the smelling of vinyl it could equally include the tapping of a pencil upon a desk, or the simple plunge of a hand into wet sand.

Such playful experiments, with things and stuff (i.e. materials which cannot be numbered), might assist their protagonists in nurturing some sense of matter’s creative contribution to life in its generously open (inasmuch as it produces affects with pure potential, rather than prescription) and so actively soulful 9 aspect. Milhaly Csikszentmihalyi and Stith Bennett seem to advocate such whimsical activity, as their influential model of play identifies its pleasure with a capacity to tease extraordinary effects from a familiar environment: a process which, they argue, existentially secures any player as it provides for some firsthand life-guidance through extending an appreciation of the synergies which help to shape the fate of people. It is in this capacity to assist in the divination of natural events that play came to define the repertoires of the most ancient soothsayers and shamans—as they dedicated themselves

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9 The ‘soul’ I’m referring to here is not the self-ensnared Western notion, but a unified ‘earth-soul’. This is conceived, by Rudolph Steiner, as the manifestation of human consciousness in its serene consistency with the earth’s generative death and re-birth flux (see Steiner, 2007, 183–187).
to ‘quizzing the supernatural’ through methods which accepted that human life had a concrete exteriority (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett, 1971, 47–48).

Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett bring the soulful remunerations of play clearly into view by comparing and contrasting its psychic state with the tedium, and worry, that is produced through prevalent Eurocentric material culture conditions. In the case of boredom, socially policed routines ensure that a human being’s potential for action exceeds that which it is allowed to act out. Anxiety, on the other hand, occurs when the demands of the environment exceed a human being’s capacity for their actualization (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett, 1971, 45–47). Each of the former conditions might be understood to occlude the earth’s generosity, as boredom has the human being experiencing existence in terms of its denial of possibilities whilst anxiety has material culture relations bearing on people in a fashion which produces a negative experience of lack, or inadequacy.

Play, then, might be understood to achieve a mental state that lies somewhere between boredom’s dullness and anxiety’s worry, as it effectively fences off of a portion of reality (from its social horizons) for an engagement where immanent individuals can act out their potential in circumstances which reassuringly remain within their ability to cope. I would suggest that it is in the revisiting of such scenarios that play escalates (through the measuring afforded by a previous reference in former playing) to become a game. But if play is to continue within a game so the conditions must vary according to the growing experience of the player; in these senses play and gaming might be understood to be identical with becoming, and so processes which are fully sympathetic with the matter of the earth (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett, 1971, 56).

3.2.4

Negating Standpoints

As they are stripped of any interest outside of their sheltered experience, playful engagements arguably allow access to life’s energetic process of synergy as it exceeds any systems—including the mutual preservations of any subject-object relation. If such a light-hearted attitude towards material culture is, as yet, discouraged by the disciplinary differentiation of art’s creative making from the former’s interest in artefacts, it is nevertheless consistent with the Eastern ontology of Keiji Nishitani. His book Religion and Nothingness suggests that the mode of being things, as they are in themselves, is a field that negates any location of their essence in any ‘concrete’
standpoints (Nishitani, 1983, 125–126). The subsequent affirmation of activity’s essential emptiness (activity being a process constituted through things, but not being of a form itself) suggests that a playful temperament—with its disinterested relationship with objects—would be most appropriate for appreciating any thing in its capacity for life as the latter might be defined in the holistic (rather than biological) terms of one ongoing process of becoming.

Nishitani finds some supportive analogue with play’s challenges to individual beings in the ancient Eastern wisdom which became linguistically adequate to life (as it occurs with material culture) through deploying confounding paradoxes, such as ‘[t]he sword does not cut the sword’ and ‘[t]he eye does not see the eye’ (Nishitani, 1983, 125). If these maxims affirm objects then they do so twice and under varying relations that together accept the different perspectives of people and things. As these ostensible standpoints conflict, so they also cofound attempts to locate the essence of their action in any of their substantial entities. But if it is tempting to assert that this process-led position has objects as mere illusions, then it ought to be kept in view that such a perspective might amount to a retreat back to a Western dualism—for without beings there would be no conduit for life’s forceful flow. Nevertheless it might be possible to say that, in their creation of differentials, things are the alibis of action (without being any less ‘real’ as they play out that crucial supporting role). The philosophical implications of this might support an epistemological re-estimation of playful praxis:

We are used to representing things […] as objects on the field of sensation or the field of reason, thus keeping them at a distance from ourselves. This distance means we are drawn to things, and that we in turn draw things to ourselves. (In this sense, ‘will,’ or desire and attachment, can also be posited at the ground of ‘representation.’) As long as we stand in such a relationship to things, we can go on thinking of ourselves as incapable of coming within hand of things, and of things in themselves as forever unknowable and out of reach.

(Nishitani, 1983, 123)

At the commencement of an act of play we might first grasp things in the form they appear to us. As this is challenged, so the subject—which is determined through determining objects—is also assaulted. Much like the ancient paradoxes, which

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10 The Nothing in Nishitani’s title, then, refers to a non-transcendent essence that nevertheless escapes sense perception. This is distinct from the emptiness that is characteristic of a Western variety of nihilism, which arguably asserts the absence of meaning to encourage a process of anomie (i.e. a negation of contested social relations) (Vanderburg, 2011, esp.322).
diminish what they first affirm, playing with objects accepts a level of self-contradiction 
that can ‘neither abide in existence nor abide being away from it’ (Nishitani, 1983, 137).

Gilles Deleuze’s writing on Nietzsche seems to accept some illuminating 
correspondence between such Eastern speculative philosophy and Nietzsche’s ‘own’ 
ideas. Moreover, in a eulogy for the outlook of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (c.535–c.475 BCE)—who wanted to convince people that energy is the 
essence of matter (Haxton, 2001, xix)—Deleuze invokes tragedy as he endorses the 
ancient sage’s advocacy of physical play for producing challenges to being: disputes 
which nevertheless accept appearance as a precondition of play’s pursuit of becoming:

Heraclitus […] understands existence on the basis of an *instinct of play*. He makes existence 
an *aesthetic phenomenon* rather than a moral or religious one […]. Heraclitus denied the 
duality of worlds, ‘he denied being itself’. Moreover he made an *affirmation of becoming*. 
We have to reflect for a long time to understand what it means to make an affirmation of 
becoming. In the first place it is doubtless to say that there is only becoming. No doubt it is 
also to affirm becoming. But we also affirm the being of becoming, we say that becoming 
affirms being or that being is affirmed in becoming. Heraclitus has two thoughts which are 
like ciphers: according to one there is no being, everything is becoming; according to the 
other, being is the being of becoming as such.

(Deleuze, 1986, 23)

Given this, I might suggest that any playful treatment of objects would be immediately 
useful for shifting the emphasis of the growing discourse, around networks and 
assemblages, onto the productive synergy that sustains their processes. Such a project 
promises to push beyond Latour’s (qualified) challenges to anthropocentric attitudes, so 
ushering the material culture discourse towards the healing promise of life accessed in 
its spiritual aspect.

### 3.2.5

**Being Before**

My research focus on tragedy gave me cause to review my copy of Roman Polanski’s 
1971 film of *Macbeth*; wherein Shakespeare’s development of the king seemed to 
provide for some dramatic insight into just how some play might bring entities into 
view, in terms of their becoming.
The role of Macbeth initially unfolds according to a familiar performatic model. Yet it comes to challenge any perceptual separation of theatrics from reality when—in act 5—the eponymous hero announces himself as a ‘poor player’ who is merely strutting and fretting his hour on stage (V.5.24). It appears to me that the instance of ambivalence begins stratifying a single being across distinguishable actor-networks. As such, it also draws attention to the instantaneous and lively versatility of being, which is usually obscured (for Western subjects) by the desire to assert the reality of the most wilfully satisfying possibility. To be clear, Macbeth is always (and all at once) both a theatrical performance and a disciplined performer, but the screen of an interested assemblage seems decisive of the former, until Shakespeare fleetingly reconfigures his protagonist as something of a gestalt. A subsequently sensed, if momentary, tension—between possible acting figures (actor/character/viewer) and grounds (the agencies of individuals and collectives as they become newly conspicuous to onlookers)—seems to occur as a viewer is caught between the differing appearances that the open gestalt points to.

Similar tactics arguably determine the content, and experience, of a ‘postdramatic’ theatre that privileges a phenomenological appreciation of the theatrical scenario, over traditional notions of representation and fictionality (Lehmann, 2006, 85–86, 99). Bilha Blum has suggested that this project has a potential to manifold appearances (particularly when it occurs in the context of the theatrical canon), as its strategy tends to have the bodies of actors conspicuously present with any of the characters that they might be playing. As such experiences problematize appearances, by pluralizing them, Blum supposes that their productions provide for some dissembling reflections on the subjective essence of social identities (Blum, 2012). However, if Shakespeare’s tactic anticipates this contemporary strategy, I might nevertheless suggest that the distinguishing brevity of the Macbeth disturbance works to ensure that the character of the king never gets to fully compete with the figure of the actor. Instead, there is a suggestion of the latter: enough to momentarily thwart an objectifying intention, for the benefit of catching an audience in the potent encounter of its process. The forestalling effect, of this gestalt method, might afford audiences something of the restorative moment that Teiresias anticipated for Odysseus (as articulated in Part 3.1.4)—as it allows them to briefly dwell in the experience of an undetermined presence (i.e. a

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11 Blum understands the work of Henrik Ibsen (whose work includes A Doll’s house, When We Dead Awaken, and Hedda Gabler) to be pioneering of the postdramatic genre.
mutually involving scenario of being before something else), arguably identifiable with existence in its universal mode of becoming.

Marcelo de Andrade Pereira has registered a similar process at work in Robert Wilson’s ongoing series of celebrity video portraits. Wilson has been making these videos since 2005. They typically feature celebrities such as Winona Ryder—posed, still and in costume—emerging from shadow into light over a period of around 30 minutes; Pereira describes their temporal unfolding in terms of an aesthetic struggle against the stasis of objects, which significantly configures things ‘more as a force than a form’ (Pereira, 2012). This concurs with the conclusions of Jon Erickson as his book, *The Fate of the Object*, supposes that locating perception within apparent contradictions, or ‘hinges’, provides some opportunity for an encounter with life’s generative ‘energy, in a real physical sense’ (Erickson, 1998, 8). Underpinning this logic is a participatory sensibility; this invokes tragedy as it reasons that just as any object depends upon the ground of the subject, so the terms are reversible. As this refusal of a unilateral human perception accepts the agency of material things, it also suggests that otherness might be legitimately appreciated as the stimulating ground of any being—human or otherwise—through its vital production of difference.

I might therefore suggest that if Buster Keaton’s treatment of the banana refused the perceptual trampling that would have the fruit as some generic common denominator then he was no less attempting to stave off the disenchanting modern ideas of passive or inert matter, which continue to empty mystery and magic out of prevalent understandings of materiality and object-hood. If this vitalist revision of the scene strikes readers as being a little eccentric, then it is nevertheless a perspective which is supported throughout *The High Sign*, as the film has the banana appearing through a diverse repertoire, which seems calculated—in its particulars, and its whole—to defy any anthropocentric ideas of agency. This challenge occurs right from an introduction where Keaton exploits an ergonomic happenstance to affect the surreptitious exchange of the banana for a policeman’s pistol. Thereafter, a further ‘deviant’ profile for the fruit might be glimpsed in the contraband itself, as it extends the earlier destabilisation by expressing something of a banana’s shape in the process of swerving the trajectory of its fired bullets.

A penultimate turn for the banana could be understood to represent the familiar gastronomic object of reference as it is snatched from the policeman (who still believes he’s carrying a weapon) for consumption by his ‘target’: a translation which reverses modern ideas of agency through contrasting the mechanical aspect of the latter’s
snacking with the provocative status of its foodstuff; particularly as the banana triggers an instinctive grab which compromises any ideas of its diner’s intentionality.\textsuperscript{12} And it is the banana skin, as it is discarded following this perfunctory snack, which provides the slippery hazard that inheres in (and lends art to) Keaton’s remarkable dodge: a moment that, in its ‘new’ location within some continuity of doing, might now foreground the thing as a productive force even as it lies, ostensibly useless, in the middle Keaton’s footpath.

3.2.6 Lost Dimensions

Steve Tomkins’ one-dimensional perception of Keaton’s walk-past—which has it isolated as an essentially uneventful, if amusing, referential scenario—might represent the incumbent contemporary resistance to the process outlooks that could appreciate the banana as a versatile and charismatic contributor to \textit{The High Sign} (rather than a slapstick ‘prop’). In this sense, his article helps to highlight Keaton’ social intervention as it supposes that his clowning was urgently staving off a technological milieu where a dry aesthetic order (of which Tomkins’ singular perception is arguably indicative) would occlude the earth’s magical activity.

Tomkins’s article demonstrates that a Western subjectivity is disposed to displacing thingly affects through its identification of objects (as this leaves its perception apparently unable to recognise the bridging significance of \textit{The High Sign}’s repertoire of banana affects and metaphors). Its undifferentiated identification of Keaton’s work with ‘the physical comedy of inter-war years’ (Tomkins, 2006) might support Jean Baudrillard’s detection of simulation which supposes that the Western perspective (even as it dwells purely in a moment) effectively acts retrospectively to sustain its own subjectivity (it tending to bestow a virtual—as opposed to experiential—history in the same moment that it determines the meaning of a thing).\textsuperscript{13} I say this because Tomkins’s conflation lumps Keaton’s slapstick together with the 1930s comedy of The Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy, and The Three Stooges. This grouping supports Tomkins’ perspective as it overlooks the social, and perceptual, significance of the latter acts as

\textsuperscript{12} Jane Bennett supposes that way food frequently overcomes a cognitive resistance, to its temptations, provides for a most accessible example of the thing-side of affects (Bennett, 2010, 40).

\textsuperscript{13} Jean Baudrillard notes that this process becomes usefully explicit in the case of museum objects, especially as such institutions take conspicuous measures to prevent and displace physical engagements (Baudrillard, 1983, 19); typically through the use of glass, surveillance, and the authority of historical information.
they shift a slapstick emphasis away from a tragic wonder, onto a quite different formula for laughter (present but not prevalent in Keaton and Chaplin) based on the failures of fallible personalities (King, 2002, 30). As this suggests that a consistency in signs (such as black and white footage, and laughter itself) has become definitive of a genre, it supports Baudrillard’s sense that a contemporary subjectivity has succeeded the earthly engaged body with the efficiency of facts. He lyrically communicates this ‘transformation of all our acts, of all historical events, of all substance and energy into pure information’ through a fable (originally penned by Arthur C. Clarke), about the names of God:

[T]he monks of Tibet devote themselves to the fastidious work of transcribing the 99 billion names of God, after which the world will be accomplished, and it will end. Exhausted by this everlasting spelling of the names of God, they call IBM computer experts who complete the work in a few months.

(Baudrillard, 1997, 23)

Baudrillard supposes that the story offers ‘a perfect allegory’ of the end of experiential knowledge (Baudrillard, 1997, 23). As this anticipates a world without the meaning of durational sensual engagements, so he suggests that it ends the hope of salvation because it cuts people off from the redeeming matter of process (which brings with it the joy of becoming, as the body sympathizes with the earth). Baudrillard ends his telling of the fable on a chilling note by adding that the pioneers of the virtual God are denied the apocalyptic event prophesized by the monks. Instead, with their task complete they simply saw the stars in the sky fade away (as they ambivalently realized the apparent redundancy of their own eyes). The philosopher associates this stellar disappearance with an environment of images, that appears to come after a cinematic way of seeing where each existence (including human consciousness) is identified with a picture of information that apparently occurs to things themselves in the same way that they are understood to happen to other people (Baudrillard, 1997, 19).

Baudrillard’s own creative response to this hypostatized reality was to increasingly appreciate its condition by driving through a paradigm environment (America) and allowing it to unfold before him as if his car’s windscreen was cinema’s widescreen. This process apparently obscured the troubling issue of a third dimension which was problematic not in its promise of a process-led recovery of matter (as advanced in my model of the Rubik cube, in Part 1.2) but rather in its presentation of a troubling
illusion (of simulation’s absence): the palpable thingly aspect apparently distracting from the efficacious reality of a material culture milieu where everything announced itself independently (Baudrillard, 1999, 54–55).

As the scenario, described above, invokes cinema in the story of Western subjectivity, it also supports my shamanic recognition of Keaton as it supposes that his 1920s work was acrobatically straddling conflicting earthly and transcendental perspectives—as it committed his transformative performances to the big screen. This itself might suggest a further performance tension in Keaton’s work—one that perhaps testifies to a shamanic optimism—as the monotonous order that his dealings were holding at bay would (in their growing perceptual oblivion) swell opportunities for his apparently magical revelations, whilst they nevertheless threatened to make the healing role of the shaman obsolete (through their insistence that there was nothing other than an anthropocentric perception—and so no rift to be healed). 14

As the research proceeded, then, I accepted that it demanded some sense of Keaton’s sanguinity (as this defied Baudrillard’s pessimistic affirmation of an irreversible subjective epoch). Moreover, I understood that the progression of some shamanic bridging project would demand a recovery of the body from its occlusion through prevalent images—this having been registered as an important precept for any bridging experience with the earth. This revivification of the subject’s body began with my own awareness of its loss—as it had become most vividly apparent when I noticed that my own nerves tended to be left curiously untouched as I viewed slapstick’s numerous scenes of physical violence.

14 I say this because the crystallizations supposed by Heidegger’s ‘world picture’ (outlined in Part 3.1.3) would have the recovery of a process matter in the order of a schism with reality, rather than a healing.
Part Four
4.0.1

Overview

As I mentioned at the end of Part Three, my researched curiosity with silent slapstick was heightened when I noticed that my own nerves tended to be left untouched by its scenes of physical violence. To identify just what was acting out (and/or taking place) to create this void of sentience, I began to consider slapstick’s ‘knockabout’ burlesque in terms of a three-fold which accepted—as it also contained the relations between—its performatic content, its mediation, and the process of its filmic reception. Part 4.1 will share this process, together with its particular cinematic engagements, as it came to align the anaesthetic effects of filmic comedy with the sight of a subject’s pursuit of information. In its displacement of a viewer’s body, the phenomena of slapstick cinema is shown to be a view of prevalent material culture relations—as they occur without the affecting matter of embodied things.

Part 4.2 seizes the supposition that emerges from the research of its predecessor (that cinema does a subject’s body for them) in terms of what it might promise as a resource for recovering the matter of embodiment. If this notion goes against some popular cinematic theories, it nevertheless accepts that the apparent lack of sensual relations, in examples of cinema, can be associated with a rich density of embodied value (as much as a lack). The part progresses by sharing a performance project, entitled Blocks, which worked to breakdown this density for a viewing process that re-embodies a viewing subjectivity (i.e. my own, as its objectifying tendency is consistent with a Western way of seeing).

As the engagement outlined above determines strategies for interrupting the gaze, it anticipates the research of Part Five. This sees me trying to adopt something of the role of a shaman, as it has me entering the civic environment to re-embody subjects. Moreover, as Blocks’ video work is designed to expand my own consciousness it begins to foreground the possibility that artefacts, themselves, can

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1 I will return to this particular issue in the following chapter.
2 The term ‘performatic’ (after the Spanish word Performático) differentiates the traditional realm of performance—associated with theatre—from those citational actions and constitutive behaviours that subsume ‘subjectivity […] into normative discursive practice’ (Taylor, 2007, 5–6). The understanding of slapstick as a ‘three-fold’ event was informed by Diana Taylor’s book The Archive and the Repertoire (2007): a publication that arguably furthered a participatory zeitgeist, within the academy, through its conception of performance as a vital act of transfer.
effect the work of philosophy: a notion which comes to determine the thesis, as it is shared in Part Six.
4.1

Negating Images

4.1.1

Violent Knockabout

The surrealist filmmaker Luis Bunuel located the joy of Buster Keaton’s defining slapstick performances in an apparent harmony of man and matter, which left audiences ‘unaware of the calculus of resistance of the materials that go to form it’ (Bunuel cited in Hammond, 2000, 6). But as Lisa Trahair notes in *The Comedy of Philosophy* (2007), Keaton’s influential 1920s productions strayed so far from his own burlesque origins (first on the stage of theatres, then in Fatty Arbuckle’s movies) that his work began to test the generic comedic descriptions (such as ‘vaudeville’ and ‘slapstick’) that his progressions would continue to be labelled with.³ In drawing some useful distinctions Trahair contrasts Keaton’s mature slapstick with a ‘violent knockabout’ that she says was both typical of Keystone studio’s pioneering slapstick output (where Keaton’s early mentor, Arbuckle, began his film career) and central to the iconic ‘buffoonery of Laurel and Hardy’ (Trahair, 2007, 129–132).

Whilst Trahair’s observation recognizes Stan Laurel’s vaudeville origins,⁴ my own experience of watching the catalogue of Laurel and Hardy films highlighted that the team did more than simply recover the burlesque slapstick comedy typical

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³ Trahair notes that Jay Leyda has suggested using the differentiating term *California Slapstick* (in recognition of its development by the Hollywood producer, Mack Sennett) for the burlesque slapstick type that relies on caricature, stereotypes, and violence (Trahair, 2007, 129).

⁴ Stan Laurel learnt his craft whilst working for Fred Karno—a theatre impresario whose touring vaudeville troupe contributed to the personnel and inspiration of the early Keystone movies (Cullen et al., 2007, 211; 661).
of Keystone. I believe the pair contributed to its development through their intimate relationship with each other: a crucial interconnection that significantly exploited cinema’s agency to share and intensify the effects of their social dynamic (and its related environmental information) with an audience. As this allowed the pair to archly escalate their amusing pretension to competence, it perhaps also allowed the duo (and Ollie especially) to get hit harder than any cinematic predecessors—through an exploitation of the apparently ‘just’ consequences of their insufficiency (Mast, 1979, 191–192).

One recurring comedic scenario in Laurel and Hardy films seems to exploit this comedic potential, to its best effect, through a process of repetition afforded by the disintegration of complexes (such as buildings) into parts; these typically rain down on Ollie’s head. This recipe for laughter was most memorably executed (for me) in 1932’s Dirty Work (dir. Lloyd French). It was the latter film then—as its viewing conspicuously affirmed the curious void of feeling identified at the conclusion of Part 3.2—that was explored and put to work for some art-based experimenting with my own perceptions: an undertaking which helped me to identify ways of affecting the human body, for the benefit of a process outlook.

4.1.2 Muted Effects

The film Dirty Work begins with Stan and Ollie being employed to sweep a householder’s chimney. The task predictably ends in some chaos as the ‘team’ manages to realize something of a two-fold inversion. This sees Oliver Hardy himself being showered down upon by the brick stack’s soot and blocks. What struck me about this scene was that as the hard falling objects tumbled onto Ollie’s head, they were only dimly apprehended—even though the humour appeared to depend upon the brick props being identified with their (more solid) clay counterparts. The lack of any empathy contrasted with my experience of other examples of cinematic violence, aimed at the head, which had me wince as they

5 Prior to Laurel and Hardy’s teaming, violence in slapstick had generally been toned down after admonishments from America’s National Board of Censorship (Trahair, 2007, 129).
6 Joe Pesci’s torture of a rival in Casino (dir. Martin Scorsese), by squeezing his head in vice, springs to mind (pardon the pun).
had me reproducing some analogous sense of the perceived pain.\(^7\) This perceptual conflict held my attention as I recognized that some recovery of Ollie’s suffering might provide for some usefully affecting creative method that could work for the advantage of process.

My initial thoughts about some exploratory project were tentative due to an apparent conflict with the philosophy-led ideas of Alex Clayton. In his book, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick*, Clayton posits the disasters associated with ‘the boys’ as some paradigm of slapstick’s interruptions of ‘everyday’ activity; particularly as they are supposed to deliver over, to their audience, the fully ascertained objects associated with empiricism’s cold and ‘cut-off’ encounters—slapstick mayhem and natural science both separating objects from their roles in networks for an encounter with their (apparently) independent conditions. In making his point, Clayton invokes the writing of Stanley Cavell—who refers to Heidegger as he (ostensibly) credits slapstick violence with a sensible re-materialization of objects:

> In the third chapter of *Being and Time* [...] [Heidegger] makes Being-in-the-World first visible—as a phenomenon for his special analysis—by drawing out [...] the implications of our ability to carry on certain simple forms of work, using simple tools in an environment defined by those tools [...]. It is upon the disturbing or disruption of such carryings on—say by a tool’s breaking [...] that, according to Heidegger, a particular form of awareness is called forth [...]. Heidegger characterizes the supervening awareness as a mode of sight that allows us to see things of the world in what he calls their conspicuousness, their obtrusiveness, and their obstinacy [...].

(Stanley Cavell cited in Clayton, 2007, 109)

At first, this passage suggested that my own experience was, perhaps, more idiosyncratic than typical. Yet a return to the quote’s source (in Cavell’s *Pursuits of Happiness*) revived my enthusiasm for some further creative exploration, as it revealed that Clayton had omitted an important caveat from the Cavell’s original. This significantly qualified the perceived slapstick relevancy of *Being and Time*’s third chapter, as it accepted that the detected affinity with slapstick cinema related ‘especially [to] silent comedy’ (Cavell, 2000, 272).

\(^7\) This apparent displacement, of a painful feeling from a painful event, might be a weakened form of mirror-touch synesthesia: a mirror neurone condition that ‘causes’ people to feel the physical impressions that they see others receive (see Ward, *et al*., 2008, 261).
I suspected that Cavell’s isolation, of silent comedy, was not simply acknowledging the technological limitations of the earlier 1920s—when *Being and Time*’s content was conceived. Rather, it was also differentiating the effects of the iconic silent comedy (of Keaton and Chaplin), which was contemporary with *Being and Time*’s 1920s conception, from those of the funny ‘talkies’ which would come to succeed its cinema.8

This encouraged me to pursue the useful potential of *Dirty Work*, but its level of engagement with the ideas of Heidegger also fed into (and drew from) my research for Part Three as it helped to foreground that the perceived disparity—in the perception of violence—could be put to best use if it addressed the different perspectives it hoped to traverse (as opposed to simply trying to displace one with another). This recognition was assisted by the assessments of Michael Nass (who had helped me tease out some of the shamanic details, of *The Odyssey*, shared in Part 3.1.4) and Nicholas Davey. Together, their engagements with Heidegger (and the implicit and explicit references to ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ in particular) had helped me to appreciate the importance of revealing the subject to the self for any project of perceptual change (Nass, 1999, esp.86; Davey, 2006, esp.11).9 Given this (and for reasons that will become clear in section 4.2.2) I might say that the pursuit of becoming, represented in this chapter, accepts the activity of viewing *Dirty Work*’s falling bricks scene in its familiar ‘sound speed’10 format, as well as its subsequent revision for a project I called *Blocks*. This is the name I gave to a project that amounted to an affecting experience of watching a modified version of the *Dirty Work* film clip. This video, which shares a title with its experiential matrix, can be viewed on DVD 2, though I must stress that I consider its affects on me as the creative work. Nevertheless, as the latter project works with its Laurel and

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8 This qualification was further supported by John Morreall’s entry for ‘Humor’ in Haim Gordon’s *Dictionary of Existentialism*, which supposed a direct relationship between *Being and Time* and the vintage work of Charlie Chaplin (Morreall, 1999, 188).

9 Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ suggests that it is only by reflecting upon a subjective perspective, as a production (rather than a ground), that a cultural perspective can be designated and grasped (Heidegger, 2001, 15–86). Philosophical hermeneutics extends this notion to the process of a becoming consciousness, as it supposes that the differential of change can only be recognized (and so experienced in its happening) after the submitting subject has entered into the awareness of the participating perspective.

10 Kevin Brownlow credits the coming of film sound with a standard projection speed which increased the correspondence of cinematic projections with the smoothness of ‘lived’ ocular experience. Prior to the uptake of sound, reels were likely to be shown faster than their filmed speed to increase the daily financial returns of movie houses. A subsequent ‘jerky’ effect would become something of accepted aesthetic of slapstick comedy (Brownlow, 1994, 282–290).
Hardy footage, in terms of its layered contribution to a shared cultural heritage, I anticipate that a viewing of the Blocks video will provide for an understanding of the research (this is not to say that the affecting creative experience of the project could not be reproduced in the viewing process of others).

4.1.3

Moral Tones

If the notion of some difference between the slapstick of 1920s cinema (typified by the work of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin) and that of its ‘talkie’ 1930s variety (as this includes the work of Laurel and Hardy) is accepted by theorists of film comedy, such as Geoff King (2005) and Gerald Mast (1979), then the origins of the change are not simply squared with the innovation of cinematic sound. Mast associates the end of the silent era with a gradual shift in comedic emphasis, away from the former’s physicality—with its challenging invocations of the fecundity of presence—towards ideas of personality (Mast, 1979, 25). King concurs, as he too identifies 1930s comedy with a growing interest in stable characters and their narrative dynamics: a switch in emphasis which, he argues, left comic details increasingly eclipsed by personalities as the primacy of an object-oriented anarchy apparently deferred to a new ‘moralistic tone’ amongst audiences (King, 2005, 30).

This change in movie comedy might be best appreciated when it is considered against the background of an increasingly anxious and conservative socio-psychology. Samuel Francis argues that this mind-set grew in influence as it met the nascent hardships of The Great Depression with a pursuit of fraternity and tradition, which was disposed to a ‘uniform mentality’ and ideas of ‘homogenous interest’ (Francis, 2003, 305). As this attitude acquired some subjective security through advocating these notions of common cause, it arguably reified ideas of order and type which were pursued through the perceived fixtures of commonality. According to Tom Gunning, this sentiment welcomed, and extended, the influence of a dramatic movie genre which had already been honed (through the work of luminaries such as D.W. Griffith) to meet the gaze of an audience with a recognisable portrayal of their own perspectives and desires (Gunning, 2004a, 150).

In Cinema 1 Gilles Deleuze’s supports something of the differentiation identified by Mast and King as he asks readers to ‘leave aside Chaplin and Keaton’ when he dwells on the relationship between a comedic burlesque and cinematic perception (Deleuze, 2005a, 203).
A subsequent vision of the movies, in the 1930s, might be understood to have been attractive through its capacity to allow a viewer to rest with, and even retire into, the subjectivity which was arguably confounded by a shamanic play associable with Keaton and Chaplin. This provides some basis to speculate that the uptake of sound in the movies was associated less with the novelty of its additional experiential dimension and more with sound’s particular provision for a level of character depth which might objectify both the spectator and the film as it encouraged the ready identification of/with personality types.

4.1.4

Substitutive Cinema

To assist in explaining how the dramatic courting of a subject’s identification—as it also identifies the subject—arguably had acute and doubly objectifying perceptual affects in film, I invoke Vivian Sobchack’s Address of the Eye. This account is salutary in its appreciation of the movies, through its refusal of any linear model of the cinematic experience:

At the level of our lived-experience of consciousness (rather than at the level of our thought), the film, in its visual and visible intentional activity, exists within our vision but not as our vision. It presents and represents an other who is with us an for us and in itself as an ‘object-subject.’ [...] Thus film is encountered not merely as a visible object but also as a viewing subject, and our engagement with it is necessarily—if often invisibly—dialogic and dialectical [...].

(Sobchack, 1992, 142)

Sobchack is suggesting that the filming camera amounts to a seeing-in-the-world. In this sense, the perception of its subsequent moving images is a consciousness of the empirical objectification process being done—or what Gilles Deleuze describes as a ‘being-with’ the camera’s eye (Deleuze, 2005a, 76). This is a view of a mature, and substitutive, cinematic process. Tom Gunning critically distinguishes this perspective from cinema’s origins in ‘curiosity-arousing’ presentations (modelled on the sideshows of Victorian fairgrounds), which exploited the surprise of a
projection’s perceptual conflicts (i.e. its palpable lack) more than it indulged the reifying possibilities of the filming camera (Gunning, 2004b, 42).

In a subsequent essay, Gunning associates the end of film’s sideshow appeal with the work of D.W. Griffiths (Gunning, 2004a, 150), as he notes that the director pioneered a cinematic experience wherein the world (i.e. objects) could be accepted as positively at hand, through an artistic enterprise of anticipating the ‘commonsense’ schemas of their expected audience. Griffiths’ cinema aspired to do that active agency, within the world, which provides for a subject’s sense of self. If the viewing self’s body becomes redundant in this process (of identifying with a representation of a living consciousness) then it is also important to recognize that any self must be brought into existence through the activity of the body. As such, I began to consider such cinema as a process which assumes the bodily agency lost to the authority of cinema’s moving images.

As he similarly registers that cinema shows a world that can only be attributed to an absent or displaced body, Paul Virilio has viewed its subsequent playback, or ‘cinematic motor’, as a paradigm of the on-going modern project: it diversifies what was once simultaneous (i.e. sense and information) for a ‘perpetually repeated hijacking of the subject from any spatial-temporal context’ (Virilio, 1991, 100). To vividly communicate what has been wasted in this filmic loss he takes his readers to its precipice, and predecessor, in a 19th entertainment institution—particularly as it recalls a most famous classical decadence:

[Nero] stopped to admire a new musical instrument, a water organ [...]. Nero’s bright idea, then, is to play the organ while confronting his enemies [...]. Nero’s pretension is not so unrealistic: at a concert when the musical motor shuts off, not only is there a liberating violence of ovations [...] but also a thunderstorm of sneezing, coughing, scraping of feet—as if everyone suddenly reacquired possession of his own body. The very development of symphonic music ends up with the orchestra leader [...] as sole conductor, but what he directs is not only the musical troop but also the mass of auditors he’s responsible for immobilizing in their chairs...

(Virilio, 1991, 106)

12 To be clear, Gunning contests the idea that cinema’s first audiences feared that objects might burst through the screen, as its moving images challenged the border between representation and reality. Instead he supposes that the earliest cinema audiences were enthralled by the ghostly emptiness of its experience.
Cinema’s assuming effect might be further illuminated through Gilles Deleuze’s account of the ‘perception-image’, which contains his notion of ‘being-with’ the camera. For me, this brought the whole structure of Laurel and Hardy films into view as it both challenged and accepted the poles of the objective and the subjective by highlighting that perceptions of on-screen characters are always framed in the further perception of the camera. It seems, then, that Laurel and Hardy might be masters in exploiting the comic possibilities of this: in the case of Dirty Work’s scene, viewers are confronted with Oliver Hardy watching the camera as he is struck by falling bricks. Thereafter, the viewer sees Stan Laurel clearly embarrassed by the occurrence. In the case in point, this ‘shot-reverse shot’ compliment announces clear roles of observer and observed through Ollie’s stare at the camera which cuts to the averted gaze of the subjugated Stan Laurel. However, it does not seem possible to say that the image of Oliver Hardy is objective whilst the image of Stan Laurel is subjective, for the former is an observing process and, as such, it is already a subjective seeing. Nevertheless, the comedy of the Dirty Work scene does not come solely through the framed dynamic alone—Ollie’s perception is not, after all, decisive of the comedy.\[13\] It also comes through the framing itself; this seems to be accepted in the ambiguity of Hardy looking simultaneously at Stan Laurel and the camera’s eye. This strategy arguably allows the spectator to share what Oliver Hardy is seeing, and frame his exasperation in terms of the layered failures (and so the anticipations realized) which exists within, and through, the scenario:

The camera does not simply give us the vision of the character and of his world; it imposes another vision in which the first is transformed and reflected […]. We will not say that cinema is always like this—we can see images in the cinema which claim to be objective or subjective—but here something else is at stake: it is a case of going beyond the subjective and the objective towards a pure Form which sets itself up as an autonomous vision of the content.

(Deleuze, 2005a, 76)

As Deleuze describes this process in terms of a ‘camera-consciousness’ he makes clear—what Ollie recognizes—that the question of subjective or objective, in regard

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\[13\] I say this because, as a viewer, I do not simply share Ollie’s identification of Stan as a culpable agent. Rather I also laugh at Ollie’s misplaced (and relentless) faith in Stanley, which makes his own judgement suspect—and so his personal pride laughable.
to the content, becomes superfluous as it is the camera’s lens that becomes decisive of the scene. As Ollie appreciates that the camera effectively simulates a human subject’s experiential history, he also seems to realize the essence of Bergson’s comedic prophecy, of a society without tears (see his citation in Part 4.1.6), as the latter’s actualization depends upon the perceptual transformation of actions into symbolic acts. This is to say that events are appreciated in their invocation of some transcending idea, through ‘interpretations which refer […] not to affections, but to intellectual feelings of relations, such as the feelings which accompany the use of the logical conjunctions “because”, “although”, “so that” […], etc.’ (Deleuze, 2005a, 201).

4.1.5
Dissecting the Body of Cinema

Pasi Valiaho’s book, Mapping the Moving Image (2010), addresses the significant research issue of cinema’s automatism. As he recognizes a level of prosthesis, which supports my own observations, he borrows from the ideas of the German philosopher Ernst Kapp—and his conception of organ projection—to push this idea of cinema’s bodily doing further towards the biological. In doing so, Valiaho supposes that the technology of cinema is an issue of human evolution, inasmuch as it represents an extension of the body, which is then incorporated into the whole being (Valiaho, 2010, 80).

To illustrate, Valiaho invokes Escher’s famous image of a hand drawing a hand to describe cinema as a copy of the body, which effects the latter in terms of both its functions and its constitution. Therein lies a concept of visuality which supports the story of a cinematic emergence, occuring together with film’s withdrawal from the embodied optical as it also moves towards the transcendental primacy of moving images composed of, rather than through, material intensities. Pia Tikka describes this as form for dynamic patterns or “false body-state representations’ (Tikka, 2006, 146).

It is the idea of cinema both presenting a world positively at hand, and displacing a viewer’s body, which supports the critical invocation of moving images in Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation:

14 This process seems to be accepted in Alfred Hitchcock’s pithy caution to one screenwriter who had to be reminded ‘we’re not making a movie, we’re constructing an organ […].’ (Hitchcock cited in Peucker, 2007, 134).
15 Valiaho supposes that this process was anticipated and accepted in the ancient Greek word ‘organon’—as it meant both body and tool (Valiaho, 2010, 80).
In the ‘real’ as in cinema, there was history but there isn’t anymore. Today the history that is ‘given back’ to us (precisely because it was taken from us) has no more of a relation to a ‘historical real’ than neofiguration in painting does to the classical configuration of the real. Neofiguration is an invocation of resemblance, but at the same time the flagrant proof of the disappearance of objects in their very representation: hyperreal.

(Baudrillard, 2006, 44–45 [emphasis in original])

Baudrillard suggests that as film strived to capture a reality through the consciousness of the camera, its cinema went on to appropriate it—through the pursuit of instantaneous effects. This is to say that as its process invites viewers into a ready-made world—through its uncanny temporal stream that looks like seeing itself—it implicates viewers in a vision of objects, which shares no sense of their involving events. As such, Baudrillard identifies cinema’s assimilating momentum with its enthralling insistence on a formal unity.

As Baudrillard’s related essay, ‘Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality’, compares and contrasts the subsequent vision of existence with the effects of graffiti, it points to a contemporary subjectivity that (in its perceptual limitations) might crisply represent a key challenge which my own project must overcome. Graffiti is disposed to expressing a being in terms of the subject, as its signature ‘tags’ affirm ‘I exist, here I am, my name is so and so’. But the objects of moving images allow for something much more finite, self-assuring and ultimately deadening: ‘I exist, I met myself’ (Baudrillard, 1997, 21). The subsequent relations with objects are described in The Transparency of Evil:

Once certain limits have been passed there is no relationship between cause and effect, merely viral relationships between one effect and another, and the whole system is driven by inertia alone. The development of this increase in strength, this velocity and ferocity of what is dead, is the modern history of the accursed share. It is not up to us to explain this: rather we must be its mirror in real time.

(Baudrillard, 2002, 108)

This supposes the existence of an autonomous world, and simultaneously accepts the comingling of cinematic perception and ‘everyday’ perspectives. As

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16 The allusion to film here is intended and pivotal (see Cholodenko, 1997, 76).
Baudrillard’s argument centers on the prevalence of a virtual reality it poignantly includes the academic discourse around material culture, particularly as it amounts to a transformation of the acts and processes of matter, into a field of information (Baudrillard, 1997, 23).

4.1.6

Laughter’s Bite

As Baudrillard explains, the 20th century perfection of cinema is a striving for disillusion (through innovations such as color, 3-D, and high fidelity), rather than a better illusion. He concurs with Tom Gunning’s understanding of early cinema as an analogy of reality which is curious for what it lacks. Moreover, he is also consistent with Gunning’s proposition of a succeeding cinema, which moved towards the perception of fixture as it animated the commonalities of audiences (Gunning, 2004a, 150). This growing cinematic disillusion was assisted by technological concealments which were intended to hide filmic reality’s lack; its account—as it extends the effects of thinking—might be best appreciated as a continuum of the story of comedy, particularly as the latter escalates and responds to thought’s hubris. Both Nietzsche and Michel Foucault identify this process with an epoch that was marked through the ancient eclipse of Dionysian tragedy by the new (and essentially democratic) authority which represented a subjective thinking’s dematerialized reality:

A new character came on the scene, masked. It was the end of a certain kind of tragedy; comedy began, with shadow play, faceless voices, impalpable entities [because the…] apparatus of punitive justice must now bite into this bodiless reality.  

(Foucault, 1991, 16–17)

For Nietzsche it was the playwright Euripides who began killing-off the tragic pursuit of oneness through his initiation of a fresh genre that would become known as the New Attic Comedy.

It was in comedy that the degenerate figure of tragedy lived on, a monument to its miserable and violent death.  

[…]. In essence, the spectator now saw and heard his double […] and was overjoyed by his eloquence. But joy was not all: Euripides taught the people to speak for
themselves, as he boasts in his competition with Aeschylus—how he taught people to observe, to act to think logically, artfully and with cleverest sophistries. In this transformation of ordinary language he paved the way for the new comedy [...].

(Nietzsche, 2003, 55–56)

*The Birth of Tragedy* describes Attic comedy in terms of both a chorus master and a chess game, which is to say that its process surreptitiously rehearses spectators, through titillating their ego, as it ostensibly allows their ‘own’ voice to be heard centre-stage (Nietzsche, 2003, 56). As this presents an audience with a reflection of themselves, in the expression of something other (a self-deceptive issue of ‘truth’ or life’s apparent identification with the thoughts of the thinking subject), so it overtakes tragedy’s pursuit of a communion with the earth. I say this because the latter challenges the ‘I’ through its unruly difference, but comedy invites the audience to identify with a narrative so its human subjects can enjoy the thrill of judging its scenarios and their protagonists as silly, laughable and/or wrong. As such, the ideas of an individuated perspective, one that appreciates reason rather than reconnection, become the ‘true source of all enjoyment and creativity’ (Nietzsche, 2003, 59). What is lost in comedy is tragedy’s delight in illusion, as it associates appearances with the process earth. Thereafter, Nietzsche supposes that ecstatic pleasure is replaced by a self-securing capacity for cold judgment and a nervous self-preservation (arguably identifiable with the cinematic genres of comedy and horror), affects which he claims amount to little more than ‘realistic counterfeits’ of tragic art’s joyous communion/healing process (Nietzsche, 2003, 62).

In his process, Nietzsche aligns comedy with a new primacy for narrative, wherein the poetic thrill, of one thing being announced in all others, gives way to the subject’s fatal question: what has gone before, which might explain this predicament? As this initiated the aesthetic primacy (as opposed to the simple necessity) of narrative, it also began an atrophy of the essential life-force which is mediated by matter. As such, any answer to the former questions was vulnerable to yielding the individuated will, which anticipates the comedic coupling of policing and pain (clearly represented in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* [1991]) as its gaze begins to subjugate events—first into constituent components or things, as the subjective eye fragments the whole in its pursuit of causal agents, and then into objects of knowledge as the subjective eye identifies its judgments with ‘truth’.
It is with this subjugation in mind that Henri Bergson’s book frames modern comedy in terms of a physiological disconnection. As this anticipates Foucault’s association of comedy with a ‘bodiless reality’, it also sympathizes with Nietzsche’s proposal that the first Attic comedy threatened the archaic ‘soundness of body and mind’ as it allowed tragic perspectives to fall prey to a ‘suspect enlightenment’. This prioritized the authority of the subject (rather than the process earth) as it supposed that beings could be identified as culpable or innocent individuals (Nietzsche, 2003, 64):

In a society composed of pure intelligences there would probably be no more tears, though perhaps there would still be laughter; whereas highly emotional souls, in tune and unison with life, in whom every event would be [...] re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter. Try, for a moment, to [...] feel with those who feel [...] as though at the touch of a fairy wand you will see the flimsiest of objects assume importance, and a gloomy hue spread over everything [...] To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart.

(Bergson, 2008, 10–11)

Bergson’s association of laughter with intelligence is consistent with his identification of its purpose in a scheme of behaviour modification. As this depends upon identifying the guilty, for ‘a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed’, he also recognizes my own painless viewing of Laurel and Hardy’s Dirty Work when he concedes that such comedy would ‘fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy’ (Bergson, 2008, 92). Moreover, as Bergson acknowledges a fragile tension between laughter’s purposeful dependence upon the appearance of spontaneity (an apparent absence of reflection which lends the subjective a moral dimension) and the tense precondition of its procession from an act of reflection, he anticipates a powerful role for cinema’s production of a ready-made consciousness that anticipates the rationale of its audience.

Deleuze’s seizure of Eisenstein’s critique of an American dramatic cinema, pioneered by D.W. Griffith, evokes the latter’s particular usefulness for comedy as he affirms Eisenstein’s attack on the former’s pursuit of a ‘monumental [...] construction’ (Deleuze, 2005a, 154), which placated a bourgeois American audience as it presented existence (and ideas of class in particular) in terms of a collection of essentially ‘independent phenomena’ (Eisenstein cited in Deleuze, 2005a, 154). Ronald Bogue (writing on Deleuze) similarly describes the cinema of
Griffith as ‘an already constructed organism’ (Bogue, 2003, 50). In doing so he supports and explains Tom Gunning’s understanding of 1930s cinema as coming after an explicit intention to realize films that could be read as if they were ‘a printed book’ (Griffith cited in Gunning, 2004a, 150). This ‘monumental’ model of cinema supports Bergson’s conflation of laughter with justice as it also seems to mirror Foucault’s account of an embryonic modern judiciary which ‘did not begin when all the evidence was gathered together; piece by piece’ but instead it was ‘constituted by each of the elements that made it possible to recognize the guilty’ (Foucault, 1991, 42). Together, these perspectives pointed me to a trap of visibility, which illuminated how Dirty Work’s exposition of undeserved pride, and misplaced faith, mitigated my relationship with the agony that might be associated with a falling brick.

The preceding philosophical arguments of Nietzsche, Deleuze, Bergson, and Foucault seemed to make it clear that as comedy depends upon the positive action of seeking information, it offered itself to a cinematic experience which, in its indulgence of the subject, emptied its perception of any material presence. In this sense, any comedy which plays to an audiences ego might be understood to be a precursor, or a paradigm, of an insisting scopic regime: one related to the contemporary disenchantment of materiality. This can be recognized in the discourse around objects whenever material culture studies supposes that things can be possessed in terms of their instrumental roles in human worlds (see, for examples of this approach, Olausson & Vandkilde, 2000). Nevertheless, in Slavoj Zizek’s assessment of comedy it might be possible to register the ambivalence, in the format, as it allows him to privilege the negations of the kind of object anarchy I described in Part 2.1.2 as the essence of comedic laughter:

Comedy does not rely on the undermining of our dignity with reminders of the ridiculous contingencies of our earthly existence; on the contrary, comedy is the full assertion of universality, the immediate coincidence of universality with the character’s/actor’s singularity.

(Zizek, 2006, 107)

Zizek’s model, which supposes we could laugh with the mockery of the comedic hero (as it subjects the subject), as much as we could laugh at their mistakes, is accepted in Bergson’s Laughter, if only as the ironic subtext of all comic scenarios.
These surreptitiously return an audience’s critique of mechanical behaviour back upon itself, the play for expected laughs inevitably leaving audiences ‘resembling a piece of clockwork wound up once for all’ (Bergson, 2008, 72).
4.2

Feeling Funny

4.2.1

Recovering Bodies

Because my philosophical engagements had established a link between comedy, cinema, Western subjectivity and an anthropocentric epistemology of material things, my research progressed with an understanding that a process-led re-materialization of objects depended upon some disturbance of the ‘clockwork’ ego. To be clear, the anthropocentric recognition of material forms was related to a spontaneous transformation of sensation into pure information. My curiously ‘light-hearted’ experience of *Dirty Work*’s tumbling bricks was effecting this transformation as it read the scene in terms of social expectations that serviced some sense of superiority. These allowed its laughter to act as some disciplinary device. A cinematic, or televisual, perception assisted this scenario through a screen consciousness that anticipated my own subjectivity—and so secured, in its viewing, my sense of a world that was positively at hand.

However, as the research suggested that cinema and comedy might be conspiring to support my ego it also implied that their dissolution, through some perceptually disturbing playback, might conspicuously disrupt a subjective complex and perhaps revive the matter of material engagements. My recognition of this potential came after some philosophically informed reviews of comedy movies including *Dirty Work*. As I understood that the latter’s entertaining experience depended upon my subjectivity’s disinherance of its own judgements—through views of events in which my ‘I’ supposed itself to be recognizing the disruption of a moral order, rather than acquiescing with an idea of how affairs should be—there was also a recognized tendency to assimilate my perspectives with those I was
seeing (as they were being perceived as independently truthful). Nicola Glaubitz has similarly registered that this disposition presents an opportunity for affecting (as well as reifying) perspectives. She reports that as films ‘technically synchronise the spectators’ perceptive processes’ (Glaubitz, 2009, 163), cinematic images can force viewers to ‘adjust their sensibilities at a given moment’ (Richardson cited in Glaubitz, 2009, 163). Glaubitz then sees cinema as I had begun to see it: as a medium that can actually ‘re-format’ a state of mind (Glaubitz, 2009, 163–164).

My early viewing of Dirty Work’s collapsing stack might be represented in terms of the way it saw to meaning as its scene was discovered. This is to say that as its cinema occurred before me, it anticipated the readings that I experienced as a durational unfolding of meaning. The apparent absence of any effects related to the solidity of its falling bricks striking Ollie’s body might be related to the public complicity which considered its scenario in terms of Laurel and Hardy’s ostensible—and socially useful—aim of cleaning a chimney stack. The subsequent humour comes both in the stack’s collapse, as it represents a challenge to ideas of communal usefulness, and in an expectation of events going wrong which came through framing the cleaning project in terms of the familiar figures of Laurel and Hardy. The appeal to narrative here might be understood to have both determined and undetermined aspects, inasmuch as there is both an understood ideal of the chimney sweeping process and an anticipation of deviation. If the former depends upon objectification, to understand the goal of the cleaning exercise (i.e. a viewer must recognize the chimney and its function), then the anticipation of deviation (which forms the comedic context) depends upon objectifying the characters of Laurel and Hardy (a process assisted by the sense of predictability that is encouraged by the consistency of their characters).

Bergson’s ideas suppose that my experience, of some anaesthesia of the senses, was a precept of my laughter as a social function, and afforded by the objectification of its protagonists. The assessments of Baudrillard and Sobchack also suggest that as my chuckles effected the comedic business of regulating social life, its fun-seeking gaze was no less involved in a related, and self-objectifying, project of defining existence through thought alone: a subjective perspective which emptied sensual sympathy from my experience of Dirty Work (through the process of cinema, as it assumes the doing of a viewer’s body). Yet it also seems important to accept that if cinema is fabricated in and through the consciousness of a seeing-
in-the-world, as it is experience being done, then it can be distinguished from a life
lived through the density of embodied value (inherent in the latter ‘being done’) —
an issue of cinema’s fullness then, rather than of the order of some lack. This infers
that something of what Dirty Work’s view does for the body might be recoverable
by the body.

The process of recovering the viscerality of Dirty Work began through conceiving
my viewing as a kind of trauma that was providing its own remedy as it effected my
‘normal’ functioning. In effect, I began to consider the film in terms of the
equipmental organ described by Pasi Valiaho (in Part 4.1.5). Thereafter the
challenge was understood in terms of recovering some recollection of the material
process, through some interference with the corporeal investment that Dirty Work
mobilized on my behalf. This pointed to a promising confrontation with the earth
that might emerge through some encounter with the rhythmic abundance of
physical presence, in the film’s tumbling bricks. It also promised some artful
reproduction of the work of philosophy—as the latter similarly works to change a
subjectivity.

4.2.2
The Sight of Sensation
As the Laurel and Hardy scene was fabricated through the viewing of a seeing-in-
the-world, I considered it to be distinguished from a life lived through the apparent
density of its images. This is to say that its cinema communicated an embodied
value purely in terms of information—which did not demand, or encourage, any
sensual recollection. For the purpose of the exploratory experimentation,
represented by the Blocks video on DVD 2, my approach began by recognizing
this simulation as both an issue of cinema’s perceptual fullness and of the order of
some lack. Thereafter, I used Apple’s Final Cut application to adjust, and test,
different modes of playback for the Dirty Work footage: an exercise which
variously interfered with its apparent televisual perception—through editing and
effecting changes to film speed, sound and exposure—to disturb its absorbing
simulation of a consciousness. This pursuit of a sensual modality, through film, was
understood as an attempt to revive the feelings which moving cinematic images
might effectively anaesthetize, through their substitutive effect.

In the experimental event, which involved me alone looking at the Blocks video,
the slowing down of Dirty Work’s footage seemed particularly effective. The
alteration of the footage apparently interfered with its comedy’s seamless exchange of information, whilst a sense of something happening remained very much intact. It seemed to me that the slow-motion strategy contrasted with the effect of speeding the footage up. In principle, the latter seemed to share a capacity to defy commonsense, but the viewing practice ultimately yielded to the comedic effect of an aesthetic that I associated with the history of slapstick cinema with its ‘jerky’ presentations (as described in footnote 10).

The video outcome was deemed to be successful inasmuch as it broke down the legible integrity of Dirty Work’s falling brick scene. This seemed to enable my body to take part in the representation as it allowed my own consciousness to draw upon recollections of its own painful encounters with hard material things. In this sense, slowing the footage might be understood to have enabled the viewing experience to make some impression on my self—as it effected some sensible re-acquaintance with the felt embodied state which a screen consciousness had formerly done for my body. Such a viewing was understood to favour neither the hard-line of comedy nor the repulsion of horror—as this might feast on a stomach-churning reaction (Peucker, 2007, 159–192)—but rather the body in the world itself as this structure demands (for its epistemological appreciation) an involvement which makes falling bricks and the body apparent in the viewing process. This is to say that the newly affecting images produced neither an intentional state without an object, nor an object without an intentional state but a distributed happening itself—as that manifestly accepts both without being reducible to either.

Whist I watched the video alone, I did not consider the experiment to be the withdrawal from the social world: if the project’s level of identificatory conflation recognized tastes and responses associable with my ‘I’ as a privileged and/or targeted individual spectator, I nevertheless believed the aesthetic ‘choices’ for the video, and its ensuing sensations, were effects of my I’s production within a Western social milieu. This supported a sense that other people taking my viewing position might share my experiences. However, I must stress that this is not to say that I believed my being has simply been passive as a Western subjectivity was formerly inscribed into it in a linear fashion. Rather it is to say that, further to my research, I understood that my body was/is involved in a creative event which has significant constancies with the formation of other subjects who occur in similar (i.e. Western or Westernized) contexts. This understanding was tested and partially supported in the September of 2013 when the video for Blocks was shown at a
conference entitled ‘Performance: Visual Aspects of Performance Practice. 4th Global Conference’ (organized by Sofia Pantouvaki). Four female cohorts, namely Filipa Malva, Barbara Kaesbohrer, Adele Anderson and Celia Morgan responded to the viewing with some agreement that they had indeed shared my viewing experience as it was described through a related research paper (Cope, 2013). Nevertheless two male peers, Arthur Maria Steijn and Ross Brannigan, expressed concerns relating to the distracting strangeness of the video’s sound, as it was reported to be completely alien and occasionally out of synch with the video’s moving images. The latter pair suggested that this made it impossible for them to suspend disbelief and identify with the figure of Oliver Hardy.

I found the split in perspectives along gender lines to be curious. I wondered if it represented a masculine resistance to empathy. Suzanne Keen has linked the contemporary decline of the novel, within masculine contexts, with men’s inability to sympathize with the inner pain of others. Moreover, she has suggested that as men avoid artistic challenges to their ego, so this resistance begins to define—as much as express—their masculine identities (Keen, 2007, esp. 124). I might say that I’ve sensed something of this risk to my identity in my time involved in art, but I have come to accept a related social anxiety (which has me asking ‘where do I now “fit in”?’) as a symptom of challenges and changes occurring in the fashion I have actually intended.

As my experiment proceeded with the (now partially vindicated) assumption that Blocks’ affects were of the order of the communal rather than the personal, I found compelling parallels between my viewing experience and Elaine Scarry’s account of a field worker in her book The Body in Pain:

If the sun is too bright for a woman’s eyes, she moves into the shade, and as she does, her eyes again fill with seeable objects rather than aversive sensation; if in turn the shade grows too dark for her to differentiate without straining, the seeds she is sorting, she moves back out into the light; she may shift her vision to some nearby children to ease her discomfort at remembering her lost child; or if that only “makes” her more acutely self-conscious of her loss, she may watch the birds instead.

(Scarry, 1985, 168)

17 I agree that slowing down the footage made a dissonance between the soundtrack and the film more apparent, but it was not my experience that it remade the audio and the visual aspects as irreconcilable events.
Scarry’s model—of a beholding which pushes vision ‘back to the neighbourhood of pain’ (Scarry, 1985, 165)—hints at how a sensibly distributed gaze might promise to open up the human psyche. As such, it might also support my sense that Block’s interruption of the prosthetic model of cinema revives the matter of the body as it prevents its moving images from simulating that doing between the earth and the world.

What Blocks contributed to, then, was a process-method for approaching materiality as a ‘framed’ happening between bodies, objects and their horizons—never purely cognitive, somatic or simply exterior, but nevertheless a relation which might be experienced first in terms of one, then more in terms of others, through the potential for an encounter with the structure of encountering itself as this allows some oscillation between self-objectification (associated with a body in pain) and some objectified material content—as the latter might be done through cinema’s narrative logics.

4.2.3 Temporal Interruption
The effects of Blocks’ slow motion frustrated my cinematic identification with the movie camera’s seeing-in-the-world. Nevertheless, the video recalled something of an occasional cinema technique, which apparently returns agency to an audience by using frozen images to defy any assimilation into ‘commonsense’ perspectives. At the conclusion of Thelma & Louise (1991) the director, Ridley Scott, tests the limits of this strategy as he freezes the film of the former’s car just after it leaps over a cliff edge. As the movie’s narrative affirms the couple’s growing freedom, the freeze frame subsequently holds the hope that the pair’s car might magically defy gravity, and continue flying over the yawning canyon (Sturtevant, 2007, 52). Such still images halt a narrative as they take slow motion to its logical conclusion. However, the use of freeze frame is often more strategic than liberating: Seymour Chatman notes that the tactic—as it occurs in a ‘mainstream’ cinema—tends to handover responsibility, to an audience, only in a moment where a preceding absorption has established an irreversible narrative drift. This effectively leaves the camera consciousness playing out in the minds of viewers, even as they might enjoy the ostensible gift of some creative authority (Chatman, 1990, 49). However, I would suggest that the symbolic intentions do not negate their efficacy—and they were recalled as I tried to come to terms with the affect of Blocks.
Gilles Deleuze believes that cinema’s frozen images—as they amount to an example of his notion of the ‘photogramme’ (Deleuze, 2005a, 86)—tend to frustrate any identification with the camera’s seeing-in-the-world, because they aim to represent optical sensations—rather than meaning—through a ‘cine-eye’. This provides for the representation of an optical sensation that ‘defies assimilation within a commonsense perceptual framework’ (Bogue, 2003, 74). I would suggest that my own experience of watching Blocks similarly confounded my ‘commonsense’ as the optical sensation of its slow motion scene strangely transcended the temporality that is associated with objects and the related momentum of narratives. Vivian Sobchack seems to support this appreciation as she posits photographs and cinema in terms of two poles, one of which is pure possibility whilst the other represents the certainty of the ‘world picture’ introduced in Part 3.1.3. Given this, she suggests that the static photograph is an open index whilst the latter field might be appreciated as vitality itself. Thus, if the photo delivers some ‘structure and potential’ it might be contrasted with the ‘existential actualization’ of cinema (Sobchack, 1992, 59–63).

I might suggest that my experience of Blocks could be understood as lying between the promise of the photograph—with its thematized possibility—and the cinema, which does for viewers the intervention and activity of the lived-body. It is in this sense that Blocks’ breakdowns were understood to hold a methodological potential for challenging a subject as it shares an experience that is always more open than cinema’s camera consciousness (which tends to do material intensities for viewers) and always more closed than the pure possibility of the photograph. To be clear, in being something less than the apparent autonomy of cinema, some creative engagement with this materiality (as it exists between two existential planes) was understood to usefully defy a Western subject’s passive sense of spectatorship—as it frustrates the latter’s insistence that the body-subject lives with and through a picture of the world. But if this intervention promised to revive sensation, then maintaining something of the comedy of malfunction, with its enduring iconography (in Oliver Hardy’s returning gaze) and dependence on objects (i.e. functional chimney stacks and their hard bricks), it seemed to offer some opportunity to play with material culture’s figure-ground correlation as a field and a tension (rather than a split).

In the case of Blocks I would suggest that the affect was accentuated through a level of familiarity which is kept intact—which is to say that the figure of Oliver
Hardy, the comic icon, is still recognizable and evocative of his comedic partner even as he was edited (precisely because he inhered in Ollie’s look) from the video committed to the DVD. In *Cinema 2*’s explanation of ‘tactisigns’ (i.e. images which strategically connect with a viewer’s sensory-motor systems, to make them the ‘prey’ of a vision) Gilles Deleuze writes that the cross-cutting of camera consciousness’s readily recognizable images with cine-eye’s sight of sensation tends to increase the impact of a filmic experience upon the body:

[...B]analytic is so important, it is because, being subject to sensory-motor schemata which are automatic and pre-established, it is all the more liable, on the least disturbance of equilibrium between stimulus and response […], suddenly to free itself from the laws of this schema and reveal itself in a visual and sound nakedness, crudeness and brutality which make it unbearable. There is, therefore, a necessary passage […].

(Deleuze, 2005b, 3)

Nevertheless, Deleuze also accepts that the strategy of altering the banal or familiar tends to work as a negative dialectic, *i.e.* a strategy that works to bring customary or ‘commonsense’ scenarios into question, rather than offering independent meanings (Deleuze, 2005b, 6). In *Cinema 1* Deleuze speculates that such challenges to habitual ways of seeing have some correlate in narcotic experiences which

stop the world, to release perception of ‘doing’ that is, to substitute pure auditory and optical perceptions for motor-sensory perceptions; *to make one see the molecular intervals*, the holes in sounds, in forms […].

(Deleuze, 2005a, 88 [emphases in original])

As the slow motion in the video for *Blocks* disrupted cinema’s substitutive technique—by exchanging simulation’s effects for an affecting experience—it appeared to demand a new consciousness, which returned me to the creation of meaning. This process seems to be accepted in Deleuze’s description of slow motion (amongst other techniques) as a ‘sign of genesis’ (Deleuze, 2005a, 86). As such, I could suppose that as *Blocks*’ experience disrupted *Dirty Work*’s comedic system of objects, a subsequent vying with the horizons of human worlds was reproducing the confounding of descriptive powers that might be numbered amongst the most therapeutic benefits of drug use. What I am alluding to is salutary
affects, which precede the meaning of matter (rather than anthropocentric systems) as they defy linguistic correlates, and announce the creative need for metaphors.

In the psychedelic reports contained in his Politics of Ecstasy, Timothy Leary documents the affects of LSD use. These ably evoke something of Blocks' fresh filmic affects on me, particularly as he observes that subjects succumbing to its narcotic effects speak of participating in and merging with pure (i.e., content-free) energy [...] of witnessing the breakdown of macroscopic objects into vibratory patterns, visual nets, the collapse of external structure into wave patterns, the awareness that everything is a dance of particles, sensing the smallness and fragility of our system, visions of the void, of world-ending explosions.

(Leary, 1998, 24 [emphasis is mine])

In this sense, I might say the affects identified as useful in Blocks were those located in a productive conflict, between the intellectual feelings of comedy and the sensational matter of tragedy. This tension occurred through contrasting the assimilations of the ‘sound synched’ footage, of Dirty Work’s striking bricks, with the unfamiliar rhythm of Block’s slow motion equivalent. I would describe its desirable effect as a sense of rupture between matter and an anthropocentric reality. This process can be understood as shamanic because it establishes conditions wherein the latter might be procured to see itself in the former. To further explain its potential for shamanic healing, I might return to its logical conclusion in the freeze-frame. Sobchack supposes that this creates a hole in time, whilst Garrett Stewart, writing on Modernism’s Photo Synthesis, describes this effect in terms of the same return of the viewer’s agency which I recognized in the affecting event of Blocks (see section 4.2.2). This is because what rushes in to fill an absence of motor stimuli on-screen ‘is nothing less than time, our time’ (Stewart, 1999, 139). But if the photograph is an image in the viewer’s world, then the slow motion of Blocks might refuse any certainty—be it cinema’s or the viewer’s. There are then parallels here with Laura Marks’ notion of ‘haptic visuality’, inasmuch as it does not allow a viewer to either retire into their subjectivity, or affirm a sense of separateness. Instead the slow motion creates an experience that restores the mutuality that might be associated with discovery, and its sensual sympathies, due to haptic vision’s construction of an inter-subjective relation between a viewer and an image. The
former is invited to restore perceived gaps—a process which heals any sense of ‘separateness from the image’:

This description will suggest that haptic visuality is somewhat different from the Brechtian stance of the active viewer [...] the haptic viewer relates simultaneously to an illusionistic image and a material object, and thus implicitly refuses to be seduced by the cinematic illusion. But the Brechtian active viewer is an explicitly critical viewer [...] while the haptic viewer is quite willing to pull the wool over her eyes.

(Marks, 2000, 183–184)

In its mode of spectorial address, then, Blocks’ capacity for sensibly engaging with the appearance of things accepts the present tense of their existence. Moreover, it seems to afford some opportunity to experience, and reflect upon, a contrast between two conflicting materialities: one privileging an engagement with the affects of matter (through its challenging object-breakdown), and another that defers to the contextual analysis of comedy (as it depends upon the anthropocentric vagaries of information).

Whilst Annette Michelson’s essay, ‘Bodies in Space’, does not deal with slow motion as such, it does sustain my detection of its positive effects. The perceived support comes through her consideration of the space-flight environments reproduced for Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). This is a movie that contains a number of scenes that Michelson describes as ‘therapy’ in their encouragement of ‘a closer, fresher, more innocent and comprehending view of the Object’. This capacity for healing apparently comes through Kubrick’s method of rendering things, as it seems calculated to defer their assimilation, into any common-sense framework, and heighten their sensual processes (Michelson, 2000, 199–202). Michelson invokes the repletion in the slow of the steps of a space cabin hostess and, doing so, she provided for some inspirational clarity particularly by aligning the former’s studied breakdown with a reviving dissolution of a subject’s ‘operational reality’:

The consequent challenge presented to the spectator in the instantaneously perceived suspension [...] of expectations, forces readjustment [...] our own physical necessity is regenerated. We snap to attention, in a new, immediate sense of our earth-bound state [...].
[Moreover repetition] erases the possibility of destination or of completion [...] in its frustration and inversion of our expectations, impelling us to a reflexive or compensatory movement [...], clarifying for us something of the essential nature of motion itself.

(Michelson, 2000, 206–207)

By confounding our own logic of action, slowness and repletion is acknowledged to stimulate ‘awareness of, the corporeal a-prioris’ which composes embodied engagements. Michelson poignantly endorses the epistemological usefulness of this (as she also recalls something of the model of play shared in Part 3.2.3) by describing such footage as ‘a very serious form of wit’ which teaches us about the limitations and possibilities of experience (Michelson, 2000, 207).

Drawing on Michelson, I suggest that if Blocks challenges the perceptual process of comedic cinema, then its modified film footage might actually be capable of philosophy. I say this because—like much of the affecting footage in 2001—it formally nurtures the doubt that comes between a disparate experience of falling bricks: one being in the emblematic relations evoked by the familiar characters of Laurel and Hardy and the other being the materially intense—or ‘radically formal embodiment’—which succeeds Blocks’ resistance to assimilation. As the research progressed it was this creation of doubt, together with its underpinning temporal breakdown, that was understood to hold some methodological promise to open up a resistant human psyche, to matter.
Part Five
5.0.1
Overview

The preceding two parts have aligned the affecting power of cinema with the apparent consciousness of its camera—as it represents a seeing-in-the-world. In its detail, Part Three discussed how Buster Keaton exploited the latter’s determining power for a shamanic project. This challenged a modern sense of perceptual certainty by effectively using cinema’s on-screen representations of a gaze being done, to manifold a single thing into multiple objects. If this apparently magical process deployed the objectifying way of seeing which has been identified as problematically fragmenting, it nevertheless worked to undermine a subject’s authority. I believe this because the on-screen views of a consciousness being done, in films such as Keaton’s *The High Sign*, seemed to displace a Western subject’s vision of singular (i.e. inevitable and independent) objects with a pluralizing view which recognized the agency of things.

Part Four took a different tack, even as it built on my recognition of Keaton’s shamanic purpose. Blocks’ efforts to counter a prevalent cinema’s informative ‘fullness’ worked to involve the experience of a feeling body in the completion of a video’s viewing. In its process, Blocks significantly foregrounded the possibility that material culture could, itself, put the mind-expanding aims of process philosophy into effect.

The notion, of objects doing the work of process philosophers, will be directly addressed in Part Six of the thesis. However, for now it is suffice to highlight that as Parts Three and Four recognized the positively affecting possibilities of seeing a view, they anticipated the work represented in this part, as it concentrates on the challenge of re-engaging the thesis with subjects operating in a contemporary social environment.

Part 5.1 represents a performance that developed from the research of Part Three. It works with the apparent certainties of seeing-in-the-world to initiate a process, within the contemporary landscape, to challenge a Western subject’s idea of independent objects. To expand, Part 5.1 represents research which uses a subject’s intention to format a performance that puts the physical body of onlookers to work. This comes through the creation of scenarios that suggest object images, to engage people with the relational dimensions of the former’s appearances. Given this, the research can also be understood as an extension of the affecting work of Part 4.2, as it similarly revives the matter of the body in the process of realizing an interpretation. Inasmuch as it involves
the driving force of intention in the production of a performance, the project is also informed by the Lez project (represented in Part 2.3.4).

The performance recorded in Part 5.1 sees me coming to recognize the imposing power of a social world—in its capacity to deflect attention from subjectively challenging affects—and it anticipates a progression, which is shared through Part 5.2. The latter is structurally similar to its predecessor, but it ties it in with an ostensibly dissonant aesthetic project to address a perceived need for some regulating agency, or direction, which might ensure that the critical reflection it encourages is turned on a human participant’s own subjectivity. In this sense, Part 5.2 represents a most significant development as it sees me recognizing a need for control over the context in which the affects pursued in Part 5.1 might come to be understood. This process puts a shaman’s usurping of the power of a subjective gaze into my practice. As such, it foreshadows the work of Part Six which pursues an artifact that might, itself, exercise some affecting perceptual control.
5.1

Exposing Relations

5.1.1

Displacing Displays

The work documented in the third and fourth parts of this thesis had me recalling and revisiting some of the comedy films which defined my childhood viewing. This process included a review of the 1968 production Inspector Clouseau (dir. Bud Yorkin)—which starred Alan Arkin in the role of the hapless detective. One of the film’s comedic incidents proved particularly influential upon the development of the research due to its affecting (and inconsistent) play with objects, and a related cinematic tactic of ‘camera consciousness’ (a notion explained in Part 4.2.3)—as it records a particular view of scenarios which anticipates an audience’s objectifying outlook or gaze (i.e. it makes a scene).

Six minutes into Inspector Clouseau, the movie’s eponymous protagonist meets a superior for a formal briefing in the latter’s office. Seconds into this exchange Clouseau unexpectedly divides a pair of framed photographs that sit on the desk between the pair—as if they were somehow interfering with his vision. The inspector’s senior raises an eyebrow to register this as strange because, whilst these objects do indeed come between their conversing bodies, they in no way interfere with the proceedings of the conversation (they are small and lie well beneath their meeting eyes, so they do not impinge upon either’s field of vision). The moment is amusing enough in isolation, but it comes to set a pattern for the entire scene as it anticipates a host of other changes in the filmed relations. As these are perceived with the camera, they are also shown to have consequences that go beyond any spatial happenstance.
Clouseau follows the shift of the photo frames with a similarly unnecessary (and dramatic) rearrangement of things, simply through an arbitrary shift of seats. However, this time the outcome of his manoeuvre is not neutral: it positively inhibits communications as his new position, in relation to his chief, effectively places a lampshade right between the pair. An ensuing ‘over the shoulder’ camera shot invites viewers to identify with the chief’s exasperation as it shows the shade completely screening the inspector’s face, as if it was intended to be a mask (see Figure 5.1).

![Figure 5.1: A screen shot from the DVD of Inspector Clouseau.](image)

The senior officer goes on to recover a view of Clouseau’s face by moving the obtrusive lamp to one side. Nevertheless, the shenanigans continue as the inspector then decides to take a brief sit down in every seat in the office. His superior follows him, in some effort to re-establish the lost eye contact, but Clouseau seizes the moment as an opportunity to sit in his chief’s vacated seat. As this forces his pursuer onto to the other side of the desk it completes a reversal which has each occupying a position opposite to the one originally intended. The process duly manages to re-install the lampshade between the pair once again (see Figure 5.2).
The humour of the scene can be identified with the chief’s shadowing of Clouseau, as it concludes with a switch of social roles: one laughs with a realization that the inspector has somehow usurped his senior, as he comes adopt the latter’s position of authority—behind the desk—through the inadvertent game of hide and seek. However, I was also tickled by an apparent inter-textual reference to Charlie Chaplin’s 1917 film *The Adventurer*. This short feature included a scene that saw the tramp character outwitting pursuing policemen by taking on the disguise of a nearby lampstand—the transformation being effected through an appropriately positioned shot of Chaplin wearing its shade over his head.

As the shade covered Clouseau’s face (in Figure 5.1), so the consistency in the whiteness of its material made my accurate assessment of its position, within the scenes three dimensions, briefly ambiguous; this brought with it the possibility that it was similarly covering the inspector’s head, and inviting the momentary association with Chaplin (or at least the comic trope, of the lampshade as a mask, which *The Adventurer* arguably initiated in the movies).

Whilst I do not want to get deeply involved in the details of the cognitive psychology involved in this judgment, some recollection of Kanizsa’s\(^1\) famous square (as it appears to be made to make sense of the forms around it) seems to reflect my visual experience of the scene (see Figure 5.3).

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\(^1\) Gaetano Kanizsa (1913–1933) was an Italian psychologist who was interested in the possibilities for art, in a process of coming to understand human perception (for more on his work see Gregory, 1993, esp. 73–75).
Kanisza’s illusion demonstrates that we tend to determine unusual forms through invocations of familiar things. This occurs even if we have to imagine the presence of objects that are not there. It might also suggest that the visual presence of a white plane might leave a subjective impression that assumes it has a close spatial relationship with recognizable forms in its immediate background. I say this because it seems to me that the ‘circles’ in Figure 5.3 would be smaller than the square, though the image itself does not necessarily support this perception (the image could equally represent circles that are far away from the square). This is a phenomenon that also bears out the Ponzo\(^2\) illusion—as it shows a narrow plane surface which seems to alter in size according to its capacity to be associated with a set of rail tracks (see Figure 5.4, where the two white rectangles are the same size).

\(^2\) Like Kanizsa, Mario Ponzo (1882–1960) was an Italian psychologist. If the particulars of his rail track illusion demonstrate that things of a unknown size are measured according to their background then it restates the supposition behind Kanizsa’s illusion: that unusual visual forms are determined in accordance with known objects (for more on Ponzo’s work see May, 2007, 25–26). The work of Kanizsa and Ponzo was arguably foreshadowed by Nietzsche’s recognition that viewing subject’s are ‘used to lying […]and] are much more artistic than they think’ (Nietzsche, 2002, 82).
Of course, as Clouseau’s head moved so the apparent illusion ended. Nevertheless, there was a curious perceptual legacy inasmuch as the image, in its destruction, made me acutely conscious of the relational particularity of the whole scene. To expand, I became aware of the camera’s image as a conditional relationship, one that depended upon the spaces between things as much as it displayed any objects. In particular, I was sensitive to the presence of the human actors as their onscreen images occurred according to the presence of further things, including the desk light and the filming camera.

My level of sensitivity, for a relational scenario, was furthered heightened—and tested—by a perceived anomaly in the related reversal (as it is represented in Figure 5.2): if the humour of its structural predecessor supposed that the viewers were seeing what Clouseau’s chief was seeing, then the shot nevertheless accepted that this was not the case, through the inclusion of the chief’s body in the right of picture itself. Nevertheless, the inconsistency did not come into my consciousness until the succeeding scene, which achieves a similar end through a quite different shot; I say this because the latter uses the shot-reverse-shot strategy (as described in Part 4.1.4). This encourages the viewer to accept Clouseau’s point of view and recognize the switch of authority, which lends the scene its humour; this is why it insists that Clouseau himself cannot be seen in the shot. However—and as Figure 5.2 might

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3 The strategy of filming of an actor’s shoulder—for the purpose of encouraging an audience to identify with a character—is accepted as an effective ‘norm’ by Gil Kenan, in a ‘special feature’ for the DVD of the 2008 movie City of Ember (dir. Gil Kenan).
demonstrate—I found a curious tension inasmuch as the shot is somewhat different to its precursor: it is not an exact mirroring of the view represented in Figure 5.1 because some of the human figure’s face remains visible. I believe this was deemed acceptable because this shot, unlike its predecessor, occurs with the benefit of a more informed camera consciousness which exploits both the new and established knowledge of a viewer who can now anticipate the intended object, as they also know the character of Clouseau (his persona arguably being the attraction of the film in the first place). Nevertheless, with my research awareness of camera consciousness (heightened by a change of method from the over-the-shoulder shot, to the shot-reverse-shot strategy) I understood that Arkin, whilst not visibly in the picture, was displacing the camera from the spot where its intended object could be seen to actually occur.

What was most affecting and influential in this viewing experience (of what seems to be a ‘cut corner’, in its shunning of consistency) was my irreducible appreciation of the object-dependent humour fully withstanding ‘in the face’ of a visual conflict which was understood to defy its object effect. This is to say that an expected scene—of the shade masking a face—was recognized as intended by the camera’s consciousness even as I was also made sensitive to its contingent spatial conditions; these became apparent through the recognition of the human perspectives, which the camera supposes to adopt. As this camera consciousness occurred through two different strategies (the camera displacing the human in Figure 5.1, but the human holding fast and forcing an over-the-shoulder shot in Figure 5.2) an apparent mimetic tension (which came from the pursuit of the same effect, through the deployment of two different strategies) seemed to make the pursued object’s contingency in some sense visible—as one shot worked to deconstruct the other.

What I have tried to communicate, here, is how (as a researcher) I became alerted to a way of initiating some kinaesthetic awareness of the relational space between things, through the effect of looking objects (as they identify and secure subjects in the fashion suggested in Part 1.2.3). This promised to introduce individuals to the contingency of their subjectivity, through an embodied process that nevertheless accepted the agency of such (objective) perspectives.

What was perceived to be especially constructive was the positive acceptance of the happening of a subjective view even as it promised to escort its self-understanding beyond its fragmented state (i.e. it would use the intention of a viewing subject to deconstruct its own, supposed, independence). Not only is this approach consistent with the pursuit of the ‘experiential genealogy’ first proposed in Part 1.1.2, but its
qualified involvement of audiences also aligns my own aims with some 21st century ambitions for performance studies. The latter’s push for a holistic revision of theatre might be represented by Cormac Power, particularly as he advances an understanding (one he associates with Stanton B Garner) that the meaning of theatrical performances comes about through the experience of physical relations (Power, 2008, 176–177).

5.1.2

Ecological Appearances

Inspired by the scene from Inspector Clouseau I set myself the challenge of recording photographic images of spatial relationships (in the environment of my workspace) that recognized my own subjectivity, inasmuch as they appeared to satisfy a subjective intention. As this experiment was concerned with the process of recognizing my subjectivity happening (as this is distinct from the process of identification, which masks a subjects agency from a perception), the project began with the simple making of a linear form on paper, which merely suggested an object.

The process recalled the entertaining strategy of the artist Rolf Harris, who (whilst making British TV shows, such as Rolf on Saturday OK!, in the 1970s and 1980s) would begin paintings of ultimately complex objective views with simple (and apparently unconnected) lines of paint. But whereas Harris would concede a hidden subjective intention, in the catchphrase ‘can you tell what it is yet?’, I rather resolved to repeat something of Lež’s strategy—of utilizing ignorance to engage the will of intention (as described in Part 2.3.4)—by beginning with no object in mind save for the line form. As such, I proposed to pursue objects in their generation through the environment, so that things with their relations would effectively find my subjective ‘I’.

In this sense I supposed my own catchphrase could be this clunky variant of Harris’s own: ‘I have no idea what object this line will become, but I will know after I’ve worked together with things in the environment to find it’. As this work willfully engaged with a popular cultural reference for the cosmological purpose of engaging with relations, I supposed I was beginning to consciously actualize something of a shaman’s socially involving strategy (as it is described in Part 3.1.1)—even as I continued something of Part Four’s image-led activation, of my own situated body. To expand: my recollections of Rolf on Saturday OK! reminded me that as the human

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4 Clips of Rolf on Saturday OK! are available on YouTube (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmilU_QKkos>, for example).
subject identifies and affirms itself with images so people could be drawn into the process of their production. I recognized that this tendency could be exploited to make affecting relationships apparent in visual experiences. This would be shamanic because it involves a selfish Western need for personal identity (through the recognition of forms) in a relational process that begins to disturb its basis in the supposed independence of things, and so holds a potential to heal this fragmenting outlook.

Figure 5.5

As I had reason to suspect that an absence of depth cues upon the plane of a surface could be used to confuse the eye, and hide artifice, so I started my formal experimenting by using a rigid piece of white card marked by a single black line. Figure 5.5 is one example of the photographs that served to document the kind of visual outcomes my eyes were then engaged in pursuing. In the particular instance shared through Figure 5.5, the embellished card covers a lamp’s electric lead but a spatial negotiation between my view, the card, and my assisting wife was perceived to create the illusion of a card being held behind the wire—as its drawn line actually completed the object that the supporting card obscured.

I might stress that as I considered the photographs to be a record of the visual relations, between the manifest objects and myself, their images are to be understood as performance records. These pictures might have documented something of the condition of fine art’s most famous image makers—as they have their paradigm in the static figure depicted in Alberti’s viewing model (previously reproduced, and critically engaged, in Part 1.1)—whilst remaining distinguishable from current art descendants,
such as the photographic images of Ben Heine\(^5\) (an example of which is shown in Figure 5.6), and the online phenomena of ‘cat beards’ (see Figure 5.7): examples which tend to reproduce the astonishing effects of relational co-incidences but can be distinguished because they begin with intended objects. I draw this distinction because Ben Heine’s images amount to two studies of one object, as the backgrounds to his drawings are actually photographs which are then re-rendered (and sometimes altered) as drawings—before being returned to their own image template for the benefit of a further photograph (which becomes the artwork). Similarly, images of cat beards (which integrate the features of a cat into a human portrait) propagate on the internet because web users attempt to copy photographs that they have already seen online.

\(^5\) Ben Heine is a contemporary Belgian artist who describes his work in competitive terms of ‘Pencil Vs. Camera’ (Fredrikson, 2011, online).
This experimenting concluded after I continued the theme of dividing the card by colouring one half of it black. Thereafter my wife and I operated together, so I could adopt viewing positions (and record views) where the card’s colour division was used to reproduce the edges of objects. Figure 5.9 documents one such visual outcome, as it appeared to disturb any easy determination of where the representation began, and where its actual depicted things ended.

![Figure 5.8](image1)

![Figure 5.9](image2)

Inasmuch as the work documented above pursued views that I intuitively recognized as satisfying (of my intentional will), I considered that I was engaged in the bodily pursuit of the pictures that cinema, and the worldview it represents, generally give over without encouraging some reflection on physical presence. Nevertheless, as its photographic images emerged from things in my workspace, working in relation to each other, I understood that the adopted views were ecological performance outcomes. To expand, the images recorded an interdependency that refused ideas of self-evident objects as it recognized their production through a distributed system. This understanding accepted that the quarry, of subjective recognition, was an effect of spatial relations created through a whole visual environment.

Initially, it seemed as if the tense photographs themselves would suffice for communicating the relational processes that constitute recognizable effects. Yet because these images represented the doing after it had been done, they threatened to ‘undo’ the very process of relational emergence that I wanted to share—because they threatened to displace activity with its sign. Peggy Phelan has acknowledged the
legitimacy of my anxiety, particularly as she has resisted the alignment of performance documents with an idea of the performance itself:

Performance’s life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.

(Phelan, 1993, 146)

I came to recognize some answer to the apparent problem via my growing appreciation of the action of ancient philosophers, and the figure of Heraclitus in particular. He had been formerly acknowledged as important (through the interreflections of reading and practice, shared in Part 3.2.4) for his challenges to being, especially as they occurred with an acceptance of appearance as a precondition of his playful pursuit of becoming.

5.1.3

Art Schools

Raphael’s fresco The School of Athens (completed in 1511) was first studied, by myself, for the benefit of the book chapter on Morrissey, introduced in Part One. Whilst the writing for that contribution focused on the mural’s representation of Socrates and Plato, the figure of Heraclitus in its bottom left-hand corner caught my eye by virtue of his wandering attention, as it was clearly dwelling on something other than the bookish object(ive) at hand (see Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10: Reproduced from <http://historymedren.about.com/od/picturegalleries/ig/Michelangelo/SOA_detail.htm>.
According to Bard Thompson the distracted figure of Heraclitus is based on a portrait of the Vatican’s other great painter, Michelangelo (Thompson, 1996, 272). But whilst Thompson sees this as a complement, the anthropologist Robert L. Carneiro has compellingly suggested (in a novel) that it could have been intended as a cruel parody (Carneiro, 2004, 68). Carneiro supposes that Raphael disliked Michelangelo for a willful dissonance (from the social world of the city) that was associated with him as he completely dedicated himself to the lofty task of painting the Sistine Chapel’s ceiling. The use of Michelangelo’s features to represent Heraclitus was, then, perhaps an effort to put the former artist back in the world as an object—the association arguably being used to highlight Michelangelo’s apparent opposition to ‘normative idealism and the sovereign power of the gaze’, by having him represent a philosopher who was known for his ‘renunciation of the [social] world’ (Kleinbub, 2011, 69).

However, as Catherine Osborne has noted, if Heraclitus was famous for his rejection of the human world (and, so, objects) then he nevertheless accepted that an agency associated with the views of objectifying subjects helped to maintain the transience associated with a changing cosmos (Osborne, 2004, 32–33). If Raphael was indeed being spiteful, I would suggest that the Heraclitus figure’s conspicuous turn away from objects (i.e. the pictured pen and the book) might nevertheless accept this qualified generosity as it suggests some acknowledgement on his part of the bearing views of those significant others around him. In The School of Athens, these figures include the 12th century Arab philosopher Averroes (who was heavily influenced by Plato), as well as possible Greek contemporaries, Pythagoras and Parmenides.

What I found to be poignant in the picture of Heraclitus was the apparent paradox of what was (presumably) a process-led philosophical work being created through an attention that seems interested in, and so in some qualified sense accepting of, the intellectually conflicting subjective perspectives around its author. This seemed to acknowledge that the endeavour of Heraclitus’s literary creation came through the disputed views occurring around him. What is represented in this perceived level of mediation is arguably (and in contrast to what Raphael might have supposed) an involved participation, in the nature of events, as the seated philosopher seems to become an affected and affecting conduit of the earth’s flux (i.e. Heraclitus comes between people and a work of philosophy which, to some extent, represents their contribution to the changing cosmos). There is in this process an abundant positivity; I say this because the opinions of Parmenides—a chief advocate of the existential primacy of being (as opposed to the becoming of process)—can be seen to be
acknowledged even as the non-commitment of Heraclitus’s pose might have been intended to represent a disputation with the former’s thoughts. Alberto Felice De Toni might support my recovery of generosity, on the side of Heraclitus, as he highlights the grounds for a fissure:

The dispute between being and becoming takes root in an old philosophical case going back to the very origin of western philosophy. Parmenides maintained that multiplicity and change in the physical world are illusory and asserted that existence is real: unchanging, eternal indestructible. According to Parmenides, the philosopher of [...] identity of existence, change is an illusion [...].

Heraclitus [...] on the contrary, can be considered the philosopher of change [...] ‘No man can bathe twice in the same river, because neither man nor the water in the river are the same.’ [...] Change and movement only are existing.

(Felice De Toni, 2012, 93)

Whilst it may have been intended as a critique, what the languid representation of Michelangelo/Heraclitus (in Figure 5.10) perhaps accepts is the latter’s argument that process is constituted by all things—in this view even contested ideas are accepted in their contribution to life’s unfolding event (as suggested in Heraclitus, 2001, esp. 37). As this representation underscored that my healing ambitions must paradoxically work with the subjectivity it contests, the perceived constitution of an object (i.e. the book Heraclitus is writing), through the views of others, strengthened the case for a public format for my work.

5.1.4
 Sites of Subjects

The experiments described in Part 5.1.2 first entered the public realm in a modified form, which aimed to complete pre-prepared but partially formed circles, triangles and squares. This deviation, from the original format of a single black line, represented some structural continuum of a project to be introduced in Part 5.2.2. More significantly, the choice provided some opportunity for playfulness as it was understood to effect a disturbance which acknowledged the confusion (between subjects imposing conceptual forms, and concepts being formed after the demands of physical, earthly, relations) described, by Nicholas Davey in Part 1.1.3, as it apparently defied any temptation to identify completed images with individual subjects or objects.
This is to say that on one level it felt like the work came after things in the environment, but on another it brought a feeling that the environment was vindicating my concepts. Some photographic outcomes of this intervention are shared, below, through Figures 5.11–5.16.

Figure 5.11

Figure 5.12

Figure 5.13

Figure 5.14

Figure 5.15

Figure 5.16
If these pictures represented a subject’s view of objects, as they documented a position that appeared to have a vision of the environment making sense. The images also documented the displacement of subjects as my photography recorded my occupation of an ecological/contingent subject’s position. Nevertheless, as the process defied the gazes of subject’s around me, my wife informed me that it piqued the curiosity of spectators as they tried to determine just what my object of interest was. Apparently, though not inevitably (some subjects were evidently being organized by more compelling intentions), this visibly emptied the gaze of onlookers—and apparently moved their sight toward the stare described in Part 2.1.3. I stress that this was not inevitable as one colourful utterance identified me as ‘a wanker’—so reminding me not to underestmate the dogged determination of a subject to reduce a relational scenario to the objects that are understood make a scene.

Further to the project documented above—which took place in the relative quiet of Folkestone and Canterbury—the process was taken to London. This was considered an escalation of the work because the city was recognized to be a pull for subjects explicitly pursuing objects of their sight (i.e. we expected the process to unfold in an environment full of sight-seers). In this event, I took a position on the other side of the camera whilst my wife took the photos (as registered in Figures 5.17–5.22). If this was perceived as some opportunity to evade the abuse I experienced as a photographer, then it failed (it was still me who was singled out for some occasional insults). Nevertheless, it did allow me to witness some onlookers as they shadowed my photographing wife, and reached and stretched as they tried to make sense of the scenario they became involved in. I believed that as these people moved in unorthodox ways, they produced a kinaesthetic equivalent to the stare—a response which perhaps approached something of the nervous experience of things, which was teased from myself through the Blocks project described in Part 4.2. The breaking of an object image, as it was achieved through the activity of photography, determined the title Snap for the whole body of this work.
I understood that if the reaching and stretching of bodies was expected to challenge a subject-centred perspective, then the process nevertheless depended upon its gaze and its pursuit of personal subjective satisfaction. Given this, I would suggest that as on-looking bodies attempted to recreate the relational conditions of the objects I
photographed (as this accepts the subjectivity I photographed with), they experienced a state of ‘transsubjectivity’. This term recognizes a subjective reference for the process of an ‘I’ going beyond itself. Gaston Bachelard associates transsubjective experiences with a phenomenology of soul that recovers the existential significance of meetings and encounters with things themselves:

Only phenomenology—that is to say, consideration of the onset of the image in an individual consciousness—can help us to restore the subjectivity of images and to measure their fullness, their strength and their transsubjectivity. These subjectivities and transsubjectivities cannot be determined once and for all, for the poetic image is essentially variational, and not, as in the case of the concept, constitutive.

(Bachelard, 1994, xix).

What Bachelard is pointing to, here, is the contingency of scenarios as they recognize the event of presence or the unpredictable (and so confounding) mutuality that is one thing being in front of another (for a full explanation, of scenarios and presence, readers are referred back to Part 1.0.1). Furthermore, as Bachelard equates this ‘youthful’ experience with a phenomenology of soul, he visits something of my strategy of naming the creative projects of this thesis (i.e. with words that operate as verbs and nouns) as he highlights that the utterance ‘soul’ actually does the phenomena that it ostensibly designates: its speech amounting to the oral modification of a breath of life-propagating air (Bachelard, 1994, xx–xxi).

Through an appeal to Charles Nodier, Bachelard celebrates the many words for soul as ‘onomatopoeic expressions’ which have people performing the relational process, of soul, that its words aim to determine. As this disturbs the linear relations that might be associated with essentialism (with its supposedly constitutive concepts) it provides the conditions of a process epistemology—one vulnerable to accepting that we might be ‘continually living a solution of problems [such as the apparent recalcitrance of things] that reflection cannot hope to solve’ (J.H. Van den Berg, cited in Bachelard, 1994, xxviii). What is significant here, and in Snap’s experience, is that as the act of interpretation is embodied it puts life, in the holistic sense formerly described, back into the making of meaning. One might say that representations which involve doing what it is that they state promise to deliver a practice that is adequate to reviving a principle concern with life considered as a whole. This is etymologically encapsulated in a term that has perhaps had its de-centering capacities diminished (because it has
become something of a byword for the interpretation of independent entities): hermeneutics. This word arguably accepts the significance of meetings and their middles, as it invokes the mediating role of the Greek god Hermes together with notions of air and breathing (Davey, 1999, 4–6; Caputo, 1987, 290).

In his essay ‘The Hermeneutics of Seeing’, Nicholas Davey highlights that any hermeneutical method is determined by the interpreter’s understanding of life because its practice suggests a process which meets the challenge of releasing the ‘living spirit’ from the ‘dead letter’ (Davey, 1999, 4). Seizing on the etymological talents of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Davey highlights an underpinning stratagem in hermeneutics—consistent with the aims, and title, of the Snap project—of freeing people ‘from the restrictions of having to feel and think solely in terms of our present speech-world’ (Davey, 1999, 6). As the recognition of this process resists the spell of immediacy that is cast by subjective identity, it also distinguishes itself from an artistic tendency to reify evanescent moments—I would suggest that fine art in the academy encourages this by splintering the project according to the reproductive media that transform scenarios into instants. Practices such as painting, photography and sculpture are often used according to their capacity to ‘capture’ different aspects of events. Such transformations do not help audiences access the latter’s relational conditions as the outcomes privilege content over any experience of a thing’s presence. Julian Stallabrass has registered the difficulty of overcoming this in his observation that contemporary art viewers often meet the emptiest of artifacts with some kind of subjective expression (Stallabrass, 2001, 35).

As my thoughts turned towards a ‘final practical element’ for the PhD thesis, I was therefore aware of some risks which might be associated with the use of images and media, in the context of art, even as I recognized the usefulness of representation for the broad aim of using the subjective outlook to raise the issue which its powerful intention hides—i.e. the interdependent and contingent condition of perceived objects.
5.2

Materializing Images

5.2.1

Theatrical Presence

In her essay ‘Embodiment and Presence’ (2009), Suzanne M. Jaeger contrasts two perceptual modes that are understood to constitute the theatrical event. A first is identified with audiences; this might play out in the realm of relations but it is nevertheless an ontological experience as it typically depends upon objectified players who hold the gaze of viewing subjects. The second mode is associated with performers, particularly as they talk about ‘being in the moment’; Jaeger describes this as a way of being which can come to exceed ideas of ‘the scripted’ or ‘the choreographed’ as it entertains audiences through an awareness of the communication occurring between the on-stage action and the people who are watching it. This is to say that its theatre unfolds through a performer’s sense of things in their unique ‘coming together’. Jaeger expands on this by explaining that as viewing subjects convincingly identify a scene, the viewed bodies of performers might register

a special communication between artist(s) and the audience, a sensuously and perhaps emotionally heightened, lively awareness that unfolds within and is unique to a specific performance. [...] This ‘on moment’ occurs when the performer not only correctly repeats everything she rehearsed, but also had a keen awareness of herself, the other performers and the audience in the immediacy of a live performance. It is [...] a feeling of being fully alive [...] and power, but also paradoxically an openness [...].

(Jaeger, 2009, 122)
Jaeger goes on to highlight that if the views of audiences and performers can be contained within a single notion of ‘theatrical presence’, then the latter way of seeing differs from that of an audience’s in its awareness of the whole scenario. In this sense, the acceptance of a viewer’s objectifying interpretation is anticipated to produce a subjective openness (on stage), which is receptive and responsive to the agencies that constitute the whole theatrical environment. Jaeger’s point seems to recognize the pioneering influence of Bert O. States, particularly as his 1985 book *Great Reckonings on Little Rooms* argued that ideas of ‘the illusory’ and ‘the representational’, in understandings of theatre, should be replaced with a notion ‘of a certain kind of actual’ wherein performers are accepted to ‘join’ with an audience, for the creation of one holistic event (States, 1987, 46).

The performer’s lively vision of being understands the staged self to be an unfolding effect of the environment that it helps to constitute. As such, it goes beyond the topography of a scene because it changes in accordance with the agency of subjects, objects, things and their relations. Inasmuch as its model seemed to amount to a conscious awareness of the idea of presence described (as significant) in Part 1.0.1, I supposed that the performer’s open disposition recognized an appropriate way of being for a process engagement with material culture.

Erika Fischer-Lichte states that theatrical ‘[p]resence does not make something extraordinary appear. Instead it marks the emergence of something very ordinary and develops it into an event’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, 99). In so doing, she acknowledges that the feeling of being affected can afford some recognition that one’s being is, itself, affecting. This recognizes the process dimensions of the ‘transsubjectivity’ described in Part 5.1.4 (as it amounts to the becoming of an individual’s perspective), but it also points to an overview which contains this subjective change and diminishes the authority which it assumes. I say this because it understands the subject to be an affecting effect of the things in front of it; if Fischer-Lichte is keen to distinguish this human experience from the experiences of objects (by supposing that the thing-side an event’s experience amounts to an ambiguous ‘ecstasy’, rather than anything directly associable with mind) she nevertheless concedes the possibility of a panpsychic epiphany—through theatrical presence (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, 100). This comes as she acknowledges that to ‘experience the other and oneself as present means to experience them as embodied minds; thus, ordinary existence is experienced as extraordinary’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, 100).
The notion of theatrical presence foregrounded a sense that a subjective change, made conspicuous to the self, could promise a startling view of material culture which accepts its human and non-human participants as productive effects of their eventful meetings. If the *Snap* project established a precondition of this appreciation (as it brought attention to the physical interactions which support meaning making) it was nevertheless clear that it fell short of the full promise of theatrical presence. To expand, *Snap* was as yet an undertaking that simply worked with subjects (who pursued the view occupied by a photographer) to activate bodies in perception and so establish a kinaesthetic condition, for recovering objects and subjects in their relational occurrence. But as theatrical presence supposed that individuals could become cognitively undifferentiated from matter in flow, it supposed *Snap*’s foundational engagement with process could be exceeded. What I began aiming for, then, was an intervention that could actually open a door that lets subjects into the performer’s theatrical presence—so people might, in some sense, catch themselves happening through an event (rather than just occurring as an actor in it). Some illumination of a way of achieving this came through making an acquaintance with a philosophical joke which is widely available in the form of the poster reproduced in Figure 5.23.

*Figure 5.23: Reproduced from*<http://www.acaciahome.co.uk/products/sinatra_do_be_do_metal_sign__6273-10-0/>. 
The apparent gag of this poster certainly recognized (albeit bluntly and with questionable verity)⁶ the fissure between Nietzsche’s emphasis on process and Kant’s faith in the primacy of beings (as the latter accepts a transcendental capacity to recognize them as they are, in themselves). But as the poster’s reconciliation came in the form of the musical refrain ‘Do Be Do Be Do’, the punch-line came to be more than a play on words—its reading having me inhabiting something of a performer’s theatrical presence as I found myself repeatedly singing, and (at a subjective level) improving, the delivery of the line. Given this, I came to appreciate that the reconciliation of the two philosophical maxims had me aware of myself trying to both affect, and become affecting, of myself. As this process came to have me as an affected being, it realized the way of being which might be associated with a performer’s vision of theatrical presence, albeit in a qualified sense of moving from one apparent moment to another.⁷

5.2.2
Rehabilitating Knowledge

My experience of delivering the Do-Be-Do line, to myself, foregrounded the research significance of a further project; the said work occurred around the time of the first Rubik’s Cube project (described in Part 1.2)—just as I began recognizing a panpsychic possibility ‘in’ material culture.

There was, near where I lived, a rather sorry looking white van with deflated tyres. Whilst I often ran past the vehicle, it remained inconspicuous until it gathered enough dirt to come to the attention of the community as a platform for some subjective expression (see Figure 5.24). If slogans such as ‘clean me’, and ‘I’m pissed off’ piqued my emerging thoughts—as the apparent anthropomorphizing of the authors invited viewers to speculate on the ontological nearness of objects, albeit for the benefit of a laugh—photographs of the handy work, such as the one below, served less as a register of the ontological challenge and more as documents of the new conspicuousness for the van, which came after the graffiti. I understood that this new visual profile came

⁶ Some subsequent research identified the origin of the gag with a novel by Kurt Vonnegut, entitled Deadeye Dick. The quote appears in the guise of some graffiti, with Nietzsche’s line attributed to Socrates, and Kant’s line attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre (Vonnegut, 1983, 146).

⁷ In this sense, I understand myself to be conspicuously consistent with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s idea of a flowing being, as it supposes an individual who comes to identify with becoming by always considering him or herself in terms of the possibility of another being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 93).
through a difficult search for the writings’ meanings, as I could typically identify letters quite readily, but not always the phrases or words which they were intended to constitute. To expand, the presence of letters allowed me to recognize the existence of a meaningful expression, but words from some phrases would seem to belong with graffiti that would later be recognized as distinct (e.g. the word ‘IM’ [I’m] first seemed to belong with ‘clean me’). And some single letters disturbed my reading as they had their words appearing as ciphers (e.g. the ‘d’ in word ‘pissed’, in Figure 5.24, first appeared as a ‘y’).

Figure 5.24

Given the confusion, the van was initially recognized as a site of expression, without any meaningful statement being legible. The squinting look it thus procured was neither the gaze of the subject nor the openness of the stare, but rather something that I can now recognize as a conflation of subjective intention and the transsubjective state pursued through the Snap project. In other words, I recognized a thing in the process of expression precisely because the writing called my attention, without allowing me to determine what it was that was being articulated. Some reflection upon this experience allowed me to perceive an opportunity for an intervention, which could propagate something of the anthropomorphic effect described in Part 2.2.1 (through the appeal to Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil) as it shared my subjectively challenging sense that objects were undertaking intentional interpretive acts.

I appreciated that the ontologically healing effect of the illegible scrawl was related to some anticipation of an anthropomorphic statement. Having accepted this
predisposition (as it was further encouraged by the context of a dirty white van—where anthropomorphomic statements often proliferate), I was nevertheless compelled to believe that as the illegibility refused ready translation (and kept any dismissive laughter at bay) it encouraged a recognition of simple sentience, on the side of the object. I accepted that this breakdown of categorical difference (if entertained at all) could be readily dismissed by a subject, but I was nevertheless determined to seize upon its perceived healing potential. I supposed this would amount to a light-hearted challenge, to the supposed ontological space between people and things, and an intervention which might exaggerate the effect of my experience of the ‘clean me’ statement—as its simultaneous procurement and refusal of linguistic translation dwelled in the disturbance of its anticipated punch-line (without satisfying the expectation).

The particular intercession involved the topical propagation of an art trope (i.e. a symbol of art which might amount to something akin to art itself, in its expression): the triangle, square, and circle—which I have formerly evoked through the Vitruvian principles described in Part 1.1.3. I supposed that as these shapes together represented some knowledge of art, they could communicate a sense of knowing without being reducible to a linguistic expression. Given this, an intervention with them seemed to

Figure 5.25
hold the possibility of a recognition of sentience—associable with the van object—without initiating the referential process of reading, as the latter arguably takes one away from the materiality of the media. Figure 5.25 records the resulting effect, as it took place on the side of the dirty white van.

I did not consider the work to be entirely successful. On reflection, it seemed that the symbolic appeal to art problematically invoked a knowing artist who was subjecting a public to an aloof, esoteric, world. Indeed, given that my intervention was wiped away, even as a growing number of expletives went untouched elsewhere on the vehicle, I gathered that its biggest achievement followed the way of much infamous public art—in its apparent generation of some offence.8 The experience was influential on the Snap project because it raised the issue of power—as it pointed to the relative powerlessness of my interventions which always seemed vulnerable to some kind of appropriation into the anthropocentric social milieu that I had resolved to dispute. This recognition of this possibility helped to encourage my own adoption of an intervening shamanic persona. I might also note—as it arguably had some direct bearing upon the work represented in Part Six—that as I printed out the photographic document of the work, so I could paste it into my notebook, the trope seemed more effective (than the original intervention) at drawing attention to the activity of matter. I say this because, in the print, the white that described the form of the three shapes seemed to make the presence of the white paper page newly conspicuous to me through the process of seeing the image. Some experimenting with the dilution of the colour in the image appeared to heighten the effect (see Figure 5.26). As I have suggested, I will fully re-engage with this issue in Part Six, nevertheless something of its research affect can be detected in the developments of Snap. I say this because the latter would come to reproduce something of this experience through a variation of the project, which allowed the agency of matter to come to consciousness by way of creating some tension within the view of an image.

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5.2.3 Imaging Experience

The research proceeded with a modification to the Snap project. If this revisited the performance work represented in Part 5.1, it nevertheless pursued the production of actual images. However, and although an image was made for display, the work of art occurred through a picture’s creation of a mimetic tension that came both through a participant’s bodily involvement in the image’s creation and a review of that image which occurred just seconds after the event that it captured. The perceived tension came with a perceptual differential that extended the work with The Wanderer, documented through Part 1.1 (as it worked with its reference to a horizon—albeit one formed by the sea, rather than land) and the sight of seeing itself (as the latter had come to bear on the thesis through the work with the Sinatra poster and the car).

The modified Snap project effected something of an extension of the work in London, by focusing on the experience of being in the image as well as being outside of it. It also made full use of my digital camera’s ready production of photographic images. To expand, myself, my wife and two further friends took turns posing for a camera with a simply embellished card—for the benefit of a compelling image which was directed by the photographer. After the photographs were taken, the images were
shown to the modeling individuals, who had helped to create them. Examples of these pictures are shown in Figures 5.27 and 5.28.

Figure 5.27

Figure 5.28
Further to my own undertaking within a picture’s making and its later review, I found (and it was a sentiment that was shared by others involved) that I experienced a perceptual tension as the neat alignments of the image (in Figure 5.27) conflicted with the experience of seeing whilst constituting the image. To expand, from the position inside the represented event the horizons of the card and the sea did not neatly line up in the way they did in the picture. Nevertheless, I remained somewhat sure that the image represented the sight of my seeing.

Enthused by this experience (and the need to propagate its affects) I took an increasingly singular (and orchestrating) role behind the camera and began some further experimenting that involved the tilting of the camera whilst performers were invited to (somewhat precariously) lean backwards—so they might effect an upright position in the photograph (see Figure 5.29). Again, those in front of the camera where shown an image which seemed to record their visual experience, even as it challenged their kinaesthetic experience (of leaning) and their own vision of horizontal horizons. Some final experiments took the project to its inevitable conclusion as it involved interposing cards between the lens of the camera and the lens of the models eyes, yet this too produced a palpable tension, between seeing in the experience, and seeing a picture of that same experience (see Figure 5.30 for an example of this imagery).

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9 I might refer, once again, to City of Ember director Gil Kenan who (in a special feature for his movie’s DVD) describes an ‘over the shoulder’ shot of a leading character in its capacity to invite a viewer to adopt the gaze of the on-screen character.
Figure 5.29

Figure 5.30
I would suggest that the photographs of people seeing, together with the latter’s seeing of the same said photographs, created a psychological effect which worked with intended objects to bring the experience of its perceptual event into the process of viewing (by alerting the objectified subject to things which were actually occurring in the image they helped to constitute). As I began to describe this performance project in terms of making a perceptual ‘switch’ happen, I recognized further parallels with, and possibilities for, the image in Figure 5.26, as it seemed to involve the agency of paper in the recognition of the image.

If Snap had used the agency of images to recover an awareness of the gaze happening, through creating a tension which recovered its embodied event, then the image in Figure 5.26 appeared to objectify my knowing: a process which seemed to allow one agency of paper—i.e. its whiteness as it was produced through ‘its’ light meeting my eyes—to come through the image. Together, the projects seemed to take in the thing-side and human-side of material culture—so promising an experience of the between which nevertheless accepted and worked with the human subject.

The collective experiences represented through this part evoked the Japanese art of Haiku. This has actually demanded the metaphor of the photographic process in its communication to Western audiences: it having been described as a pursuit of a ‘zoom-lens effect’ in which there is ‘a rapid shift of focus, of space and distance’ (Higginson & Harter, 2009, 116). If this Eastern poetry typically orientates around an object, it nevertheless works to allow the two sides of its activity to appear. Here is an example by Kaga no Chiyo:

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things picked up
all start to move
low-tide beach
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(Chiyo in Higginson & Harter, 2009, 117)

In their volume, The Haiku Handbook, William J. Higginson and Penny Harter seize on this work in its capacity to put subjects in touch with a cosmological force unfolding:

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First we are in close, actually feeling the rough shells in our hands, then sudden startled movements. Then we look up, across the broader expanse of water. Our surprise and delight
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in this small squirming in our palms is tempered by the breadth of the beach and sea, and our own smallness as we, too, wriggle in the grip of forces we do not understand.

(Higginson and Harter, 2009, 117)

I would suggest that as I proceeded in a condition, associable with the Haiku’s affecting poetry, I also wanted to reproduce something of the Haiku effect, as it has been described in terms of the creation of poles which can make a ‘spark gap’ affecting manifest. I supposed this was important because it was significantly identifiable with the lively nothingness of Keiji Nishitani’s process philosophy (introduced in Part 3.2.4) (Higginson and Harter, 2009, 117).
Part Six
6.0.1

Overview

A reflection on the research, which occurred after Snap, identified an escalation of my art’s philosophical dimensions. I say this because Snap recognized that an art-led, mimetic, strategy can make the precondition of becoming—i.e. difference—apparent for the purpose of affecting others (the basis of this being explained in Part 1.1.3). However, as Snap’s later developments had me exercising some control over the participants’ engagement with images, I recognized that its presented artifact needed to have some further authority built into its object—if it was to be fully adequate to the task of philosophy. This part sees me responding to this possibility, and its demands, as it also tests the outcomes through the design and execution of an experiment; it also acts as the culmination of my thesis as it describes developments which involve the material culture of paper in the production of the said experiment’s distributed performance.

The experiment foregrounds for me, and aims to foreground for others, the affecting matter of the physical page in order to enable a process-led revision of its materiality. It aims to do this in a fashion which affirms that engagements with things can reproduce the mind-expanding effects of process philosophy. Because its performance (which is entitled Fold) involves an artifact which embodies the findings of my project, the execution process may be understood as an attempt to disseminate the thesis through the object medium. However, the thesis is now also extended to incorporate both the object’s creation and its delivery. As these latter events include the philosophically affecting relations that the experimental outcome hopes to propagate, the part’s account (of the experiment’s production and execution) is also intended to register the thesis’s findings in their existential expression.

In Zarathustra, Nietzsche recognizes that philosophy does not simply challenge people: it assists them on a journey beyond themselves (Nietzsche, 1997, 141–142). This work involves masking a subject’s vulnerability, through highlighting a proclivity for engagement that makes the passing away (of a vulnerable or suspect perspective) ‘fair to behold’ (Nietzsche, 1997, 142). If my understanding of this foreshadowed the thesis’s conflation of art and philosophy, it also recognizes that their shared challenge—of engaging and involving human subjects to take them beyond themselves—is commensurate with a hope of integrating process into the study of material culture (as Nietzsche’s idea of philosophy recognizes the existential primacy of affecting meetings). The performance-led method of explicating my experiment
reflects a will to emphasise my sense that philosophy, art, and material culture studies might together share an interdisciplinary future.

I have chosen to represent the production through Lawrence Halprin’s workshop model for optimizing performance practices. In its customary deployment, Halprin’s approach begins with a conceptual breakdown of the theatrical presence described in Part 5.2.1. Given this, it exposes (for modification) dimensions of theatre—such as its fabric, its choreography, and its unfolding time—which might be accepted as instrumental by any viewing subjects. But in so doing it affords an escalation of the dynamic—i.e. reflective and reflexive—subtleties of theatrical presence, by recognizing a whole set of affecting relations. I believe this sustains a capacity to open up the relational issue of becoming that is associated with the work of process philosophy (as much as the notion of process in general).

In workshops, Halprin’s optimizing structure goes under the moniker of the RSVP cycle. Its name is an acronym that acts as a memory aid—one intended to evoke four key conditions for theatrical performances, which recognize the principles for enfolding change into performed actions (Schechner, 2002, 200). These are

- **Resources**—these include time, physical things, and subjects.
- **Score**—this refers to the instructions that might prescribe, or more openly describe, some format for the action.
- **Valuation**—this stage accepts that a performance process must afford the assessment that invites a response.
- **Performance**—this acknowledges that there must be some way of setting things in motion.

In its conventional environment, the RSVP cycle is expected to empower performance practitioners, by nurturing the environmental sensitivity that is associated with the notion of theatrical presence. I might also note, then, that it might be understood as a model for remaking experience in terms of a scenario (as it is described in Part 1.0.1)—particularly as its valuation stage anticipates a presentation that occurs in accordance with the affecting agencies of others. In this sense, and whilst it will be primarily applied here as a retrospective lens, its theatrical model of presence will be shown to be actively at work throughout the experiment’s development. So, whilst the written
account defers to its four-fold structure, the entire cycle might be recognized as occurring within each stage. As a consequence there is some inevitable blurring of the RSVP categorizations.
6.1

In the Event

6.1.1

Resources

My experiment is built around the material culture of paper. This decision developed from the research represented in Part Five which had helped me to recognize paper as paradigmatic of a chief research challenge—this amounting to the way that function tends to efface the activity of matter in the mind of Western subjects (a problem which can be identified with Heidegger’s notion of ‘world picture’, introduced in Part 3.1.3).

*Snap* afforded two contrasting engagements with paper as this was a palpable thing used to carry formal representations into recognizable images which then occluded the former physicality. To expand, *Snap’s* preparatory physical, perceptual and intellectual work meant that ‘papery’ agencies (at work in the paper’s whiteness, its malleable thinness, and its useful portability) did not go unrecognized by me, in the process of *Snap’s* production. Nevertheless the holistic acknowledgement of the event’s thing-side was absent from my mind during the process of taking and reviewing the photographic documents (*i.e.* Figures 5.11–5.16); the success of the project, as it was expected to bring the matter of other people’s bodies into play, hinged on a participant’s intentional pursuit of this disappearance—as it represented the effect of an image which could meet their subjective gaze.

Taken as a whole, then, the *Snap* project helped me to reconceive my project and its challenges in terms of a page: when reading something written on the latter I recognize that I tend to pay no heed to the affecting event of the paper that helps to support the significant process. Instead, I concentrate purely on a subjective, and fragmenting, interpretation of what is in front of me. If this takes me away from the
healing possibilities of material affects it might also be understood to positively affirm a transcendental reality (I will explain just how through the invocation of Heraclitus below).

As Part 5.2.2 saw me experimenting with printed images, it took me to a perceptual threshold where I began to see an image being made through the agency of paper. This had me variously seeing paper happening through a representation, and it disappearing in the perception of an image (which then hid the paper, as it effected something of the realist ‘conceit’ described in Part 1.1.1). Given this, I supposed it produced something of the gestalt dilemma described in Part 3.2.5. If this tension held the potential of some recognition of the paper’s agency in the experience of whiteness, then the perceptual tension (itself) promised to reproduce something of Leif’s effect as it similarly resisted the self-satisfaction of will, pursued by the gaze. Moreover, because the agency of paper afforded its delivery to private spaces (as it was portable, and could be slipped under locked doors), it promised an engagement that could occur without the negative bearing of a public world.\(^1\) I believed such a delivery also had the potential to extend an awareness of overlooked material culture relations (i.e. discreet phenomena, such as the gap between a door and a floor, could be recognized as operational). The pursued privacy also promised to counter the brevity of Snap’s affects (as they seemed to be compromised by people’s public need to do something, or get somewhere, else), I supposed privacy also afforded an opportunity to indulge thoughts and behaviours, which might otherwise be suppressed by the will of other subjects.

I might further illuminate the experiment, and the choice to involve the material culture of paper, through some invocation of a further story associated with the philosopher Heraclitus (formerly introduced through parts 3.2.4 and 5.1.3); particularly his shamanic role of mediating between a cosmos (defined by change) and a social world that depended on the fragmenting supposition of stability—i.e. a quasi-platonic recognition of particular things which equates them with constancy and an ontology of difference, through their referral to the labelling words of language (Lal Das, 2006, 159).

Heraclitus philosophically pursued the oneness of process. He put it in the ancient Greek, in a fashion which seems to anticipate the affecting strategy of Haiku:

\(^1\) An overt example of the bearing negativity I’m referring to is registered in Part 5.1.4 where shouts of ‘wanker’ were understood as attempts to return goings on in the street to something more familiar. Parts 1.2.2 and 2.3.1 register some avoidance of this slight’s underpinning gaze as useful for my own engagements.
As all things change to fire,
    and fire exhausted
falls back into things,
    the crops are sold
for money spent on food
(Heraclitus, 2001, 15)

The closeness of Heraclitus’s work to that of familiar poets described a need for him to distance himself from the social world of humans—apparently for fear of some misleading conflation of his affecting prose with the effects the former art (Haxton, 2001, xxiv–xxv). Nevertheless, he recognized that his philosophical task (as much as its holistic message) brought social obligations with it. This accepted the need for an engagement that could work with civic outlooks without compromising the message of his cosmological agenda. My appreciation of a pivotal page/paper gestalt echoes Heraclitus’s recognition that as provincial linguistic engagement serves its purpose—to ‘keep things known in common’ (Heraclitus, 2001, 61)—it distracts from the terrestrial (i.e. non-transcendent) message of process (as the latter promotes a connection with becoming, and so the cosmos itself). In so doing, linguistic meaning risks affirming the primacy of some reliable ideational world—beyond the physical matter of change that constitutes the significant supporting event (of appearance) itself. I would suggest that it is in this sense that Heraclitus supposes that language can make ‘the wisest man sound apish’—as words compromise the message of process by affirming an elsewhere of fixed things (Heraclitus, 2001, 65).

As Heraclitus needed to share his philosophical work On Nature, then, he met the challenge in a performance-led fashion that foreshadows the methodology of my thesis. According to Diogenes Laertius, Heraclitus addressed the perceived problem with a re-staging of his work which came through its display in a temple. This arguably framed his ‘book’ (actually a papyrus scroll) as tense offering which lay just beyond the recognition of a civic subject’s public state of mind (as explained in Part 3.1.1), as it also appeared to acknowledge the attention of the gods:

Some say he dedicated […] it in the temple of Artemis, having endeavoured to write rather unclearly, so that only those able might approach it and so that it might not be easily looked down upon […] by the public.

(Diogenes Laertius cited in Schur, 1998, 1)
David Schur offers a widely accepted understanding of Heraclitus’s activity. He suggests that the location of his literary work, in the divine context of a temple, venerably recognizes and reiterates the effect of his verses, which defer to the cosmos. This is because their contrary style similarly overcomes the ontological outlook which sustains civic subjects, in much the same way as the paradoxes of Eastern philosophy (described in Part 3.2.4) unravel ideas of subjects and objects (Schur, 1998, 7; 55).

In the light of my research I would suggest that Heraclitus’s re-staging recognizes the temple’s purpose, as a site where beings are slaughtered for altering affects. These anticipate the further sacrifices of subjects—i.e. as ritual sacrifice recognizes human beings in their dependence upon other beings, worshippers defer to the latter’s life-giving power and negate the selfish sense of authority which defines the subjective outlook (Nash, 2010, 19). I would suggest that the process accords as much with the propagation of process as any affecting use of contradiction and paradox. To illuminate the perceived strategy in less anachronistic terms, I might say that I believe the presentation of his ‘book’, beneath a divine gaze, resulted in his ‘pages’ being apprehended in terms of a relational materiality that transforms any appearance into a relational event. In this revision, the literary object (which also accepts a reader in a world) becomes manifest as a scenario which exceeds the signified meaning of its language, even as it includes it.

To expand, if the presentation of Heraclitus’s work in the temple amounted to a public display of his words, then it also placed its interactions with human visitors in view of the pantheon. This surely venerated the book, but I would also suggest that it rendered the objectifying gaze of its human onlookers as an object of contemplation for the gods. If this prohibited people’s self-satisfaction (and, so, alienation from the changing matter of the earth) by encouraging a manifold of reflections on one’s own objectified being, then it resisted a civic individual’s perception of division as it framed all beings as contingent expressions of the cosmos.

Given the above, I would suggest that Heraclitus orchestrated a shamanic event, which worked with his social milieu to create an appropriate environment for his process philosophy. To expand, as On Nature’s situation apparently subjected onlookers to the determining gaze of divine authorities it arguably meant that a human viewing occurred in the context of presence, or ‘being before’ which resists the foreclosures of subjective identity as it emphasizes that the effects of seeing are in ‘constant movement’ (Gumbrecht, 2004, 17; Fischer-Lichte, 2008, 99). Moreover, I
would suggest a viewer’s awareness of being determined through seeing embodies their vision and encourages reflections which might order it in terms of the same contingency suggested by the former movement. As this exposes the relational circumstances of objects, so it creates appropriate conditions for healing the subject-object rift. If this tactic accepted the process of reading, it nevertheless made it apparent as the ‘spark gap’ of relations (described in Part 5.2.3) that refuses any passive or causal status for its contributory components, or actors (those being both human ‘worshippers’ and the non-human ‘book’).

My revision of this tale symbolises the nature of affect that has unfolded in this thesis, especially as it progressed with the recognition that material culture studies’ emerging interest in process would be well served by a re-engagement with objects, in performance terms of a scenario. But as the story puts the objectifying power of the physical world into a material culture relation, it underscores the significance of the authority exercised in Snap’s pedagogical variant, described in Part 5.2. Moreover, as Heraclitus’s book arguably effected the work of process philosophy (by making a ‘spark gap’ apparent to subjects) without the presence of a human philosopher, it communicates the possibility of something of what my experiment wished to test: that things themselves, as they occur through material culture relations, can effect the work of philosophy.

I might, then, stress that as I recognized the bearing power of all things as a resource, I was also aware that it would could only become apparent through a modified relationship between subjects and objects which my production would need to score—in accordance with my new knowledge of vision’s character.

6.1.2
Score
I believe that the simple line drawings associated with informative origami diagrams are able to score a healing engagement between human subjects and the material culture of paper. Such instructions tend to be read as a sign of ignorance by the human subjects they engage. Given this, for the purpose of this creative experiment, I supposed that the process of their ‘reading’ had a potential to put something of the pantheon’s work, as it is described above (i.e. the objectification of human subjects), into their references to paper. This is because the process of deferring to these instructions seem to momentarily diffuse the power of the gaze that the illustrations procure; that is, in my experience, knowing what the line drawings mean paradoxically
bring the knowledge of one’s own subjective inadequacy (to achieve what is being shown) with it. While promising an object that could begin the subjectively challenging work of process philosophy—in a holistically inclusive way—the prevalent media of origami instructions (i.e. paper books) afforded an opportunity to reproduce the pivotal page/paper gestalt or threshold (also described above) so that paper might become apparent through a tension created by the page.

My adoption of origami was directly anticipated by the process of looking at Figure 5.25 the first time I printed it out on paper. As this activity had me viewing an art trope that seemed to signify knowledge (of art) itself—rather than a content which was referred to—it reproduced the animating affects anticipated for the abandoned car. As such, it made me sensitive to the possibility of something mindful, and so perhaps objectifying, occurring on the side of the paper. This effect disturbed a subjective sense that my ‘I’ was the origin of the image’s experience. It aligned with David Loy’s account of a meditative state, particularly as its effect is explained through the invocation of the 13th century Zen master, Dogen:

To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this trace continues endlessly.

(Dogen, cited in Loy, 2002, 7).

This might explain why I identified my engagement— with Figure 5.25’s representation of knowing itself—as a possible strategy, for making subjects newly sensitive to the affecting agencies of matter. Indeed, Dogen’s take on meditation recognizes that the subject’s sense of being objectified—through their own perception—can be so completely ‘grounding’ of objects (inasmuch as it allows the experience itself to undermine the subjective thoughts that generally control them) that, in time, all beings can come to be understood as mere effects of their forceful encounters.

While the physical printed picture of figure 5.25 afforded me a key, sensational, glimpse of paper acting out, I nevertheless accepted that its references lacked sufficient authority (for its simple deployment in an experiment which used the perceptions of others) even as its image objectified knowing itself: the picture as it occurred on the car was, after all, rapidly singled out for a dismissive erasure. I recognized some appreciation of this problem, and the possibility of its overcoming, in Japanese art.
Origami has always held some fascination for me due to its capacity to afford some contrast between my Western, ephemeral, treatments of paper and an Eastern outlook that esteems the latter product. Peter Engel’s book, *Origami: From Angelfish to Zen* (1989) demonstrates this tension, less in terms of the origami process and more in terms of its mode of transmission, from the East to the West. This turns an Eastern material culture repertoire into an instructional paper archive, for those who wish to learn its methods.

In an outline of the educational benefits of origami, George Levenson notes that, ‘like hand games, and dancing’, origami in Japan is generally passed on from person to person (Levenson, 2008, online). This recognizes a contrast with its learning through instructions in a Western context—one which accepts the possibility of a philosophizing object as it sees the work of a human being put into effect through the perception of a thing. Indeed, as I looked through books which were full of such instructional imagery, without any object end in mind (i.e. I did not want to know how to make a crane, or some such entity), I became aware that I was being objectified in my not knowing but disarmed by a symbolic promise (of the clear black line drawings, and sequential photographs, which illustrated a method) to inform and re-empower.

In its process, this led to a level of introspection that accepted my objectification (i.e. I saw myself as lacking in my process of objectifying, as what I identified was my ignorance), and negotiated some need to resist (through the unrealized promise of mastery). Over a period of time, such introspective events made the presence of the papery origami book apparent as I recognized myself as being before, and through, the activity of paper—even as I ‘read’ the instructional pages. I believe that the lively effect was associated with the sense of ‘constant movement’ invoked through the tale of Heraclitus’s book, above. If this occurrence was similar to my experience of the material image of the triangle, square and circle represented in Figure 5.25, it was perhaps because the instructional format reproduced a similar sense of authority. However, I believed the instruction sheets were more disarming through their promise to restore an imbalance of knowledge even as they made me aware of my level of origami incompetence.

I might briefly communicate something of my experience of these instructions, not by reproducing them (though I will come to do that below), but rather by sharing the visual joke of Figure 6.1. I would suggest that its abrupt curtailment of the instruction effect affords some recognition of it happening: as the fooling works by swapping an instructional process of skills sharing for the esotericism of magic, it arguably affords a
contrast of protective social and open states of mind. That is, you might laugh to show you are informed enough to recognize the joke, even though it duped you as it took you in; simultaneously, however, you must be disarmed, before you can be ‘had’.

Figure 6.1: Reproduced from <http://xmasons.com/prints/folding-an-origami-crane/>.

To recap: as origami instructions objectified me in my not knowing, they afforded an overview of myself happening in relation to the papery instructions in front of me. Given this, the ‘unfolding’ experience afforded an appreciation of my wilful self happening in terms of the paper in front of me. As this experience came through, and with, an overview of my own subjectivity there was a sense that I was witnessing the instruction sheet testifying to its own unfolding thing-side. This sense of a powerful expression of paper, as it occurs by virtue of an engaged other (i.e. myself), is considered to be one latent reward of origami training in Japan: the origami sensei Akira Yoshizawa has noted that, as its matter acts itself out in the whole process, ‘you have to be humble before the paper, you have to have a conversation with it’ (Yoshizawa cited in Engle, 1989, 33).
The experience of viewing paper origami instructions, much like the ones reproduced through Figure 6.2, seemed to bring notions of intention and affordance together in one view. On one level, as such origami instructions fold the thing-side of what they represent into their images, they create a bridge that potentially changes the viewing subject as he or she attunes to the occurrence of paper happening in the event of the images. In this sense, the instructions not only have a capacity to teach a Japanese art form, they have a capacity to realise the general aspiration of learning in Japan, as its linguistic equivalent, narau, carries ‘the sense of “taking after” something; of making an effort to stand essentially in the same mode of being as the thing one wishes to learn about’ (Nishitani, 1983, 128). To amplify this key process effect, I made a decision that any instructions deployed for the experiment would not refer to an object outside of the paper-folding event. Whilst I will return to the process of their production (as it necessitates an engagement with the performance of paper) in Part 6.1.4, the instructional outcome or score—as it pursues a folded piece of paper itself (rather than a crane, or some such other thing)—is represented in Figure 6.3.
This set of images was produced after I made a movie of myself folding a piece of A4 paper. The video recording was used a resource for nine ‘stills’ which could represent the folding process; these images were then traced (by me) before arrows were added to provide for a sense of movement. I anticipated that the diagrammatic outcome could potentially direct actions which reproduced the videoed event for those who chose to engage with it in a literal sense. Nevertheless, as the instructional drawing took place on the same kind of paper which was used for the videoed process, it afforded a further performance wherein I experienced myself becoming objectified by the instructional content: I began to understand myself to be an effect of the paper that was formerly perceived (in the videoed folding) as somewhat passive. In the sense that the latter affects encouraged me to share the picture (as I believed it could hold and propagate something of the disturbance of my subjectivity), the drawing experience began to help score the bigger project of its picture’s dissemination. Given the above I considered that the project included a prescore which involved

1. *The video of myself folding a piece of paper;*
2. Compressing the video into nine stills.

These two elements helped to score a further progression which amounted to the following list of instructions (to myself)

1. Hand draw two ‘original’ diagrammatic scores of origami folding as per Figure 6.3.
2. Place each drawing in an envelope.
3. Travel to the place of work of the first recipient (in Plymouth).
4. Slip one envelope under recipient’s door.
5. Travel to the place of work of the second recipient (in Dundee).
6. Slip the other envelope under recipients door.
7. Meet all together for the first time at the PhD viva.

The distribution element of Fold was described by the PhD examination format, which involves a submission to two people; therefore, the two examiners (internal and external) of my thesis were also chosen as the two recipients of the diagrammatic scores. The arrangement was seized in its opportunity to make difference, itself, an issue for the intended recipients. As I will explicate below, I understood this might occur through the exploiting the divisive potential of the examination’s duality—particularly as the nuances of the hand-drawn submissions could raise the issue of a recipient having, and thus valuing, an original drawing.

6.1.3 Valuation

The singular implications of originality, in a context that was understood to involve two recipients, had a capacity to raise the question—for each examiner—of what the other examiner had/was seeing. In its effect, I hoped an awareness of otherness or difference itself might—in the examination context—reproduce something of the on-going disturbance, to intended objects (i.e. the objects which wilful subjects identify to make their worlds), which shoots through the thesis as a creative strategy. The signs of originality, in the hand drawn submissions, were expected to be suggestive of some undefined other occurring elsewhere. Although this invocation seems to conflict with

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2 This was introduced, in terms of an explicit engagement with difference, in Part 2.1.
the pursuit of a private viewing, the level of uniqueness in each drawing and its presentation (as it was combined with a significant geographical obstacle—one recipient being in Plymouth, the other Dundee) was expected to keep the other’s object at bay, even as the examination process invoked a shared experience. Indeed, I had hoped that the viva voce would extend the thesis, in its provision for the circumstances of some consensus (i.e. the recipients would meet). Unfortunately, and as I will explicate in the forthcoming section on performance, the need to replace the internal examiner thwarted this intention.

In his book on the representation of experience, *Envisioning Information*, Edward R. Tufte cites the photographer Garry Winogrand to affirm ‘There is nothing as mysterious as a fact clearly described’ (Winogrand cited in Tufte, 1992, 68). I would suggest that the source of this mystery might be associated with a capacity of its representations to bring a tension between process and objects to the fore. I will expand on this through some further recourse to Nietzsche. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche distinguishes the reason of Socrates from the ‘honest’ ideas of his Greek predecessors: the point being that as the latter accepted that the issue of command formed the basis of *polis* life, the pre-Socratics recognized the fundamental significance of a powerful difference which was made apparent through meetings (Nietzsche, 2007, 13).

Nietzsche understands Socratic reasoning to be a reactive attempt to circumvent a subsequent discomfort with the implicit issue of weakness. The anxiety comes about through a subject’s perception that they are simply enacting the will of another rather than realizing themselves through a relation (this resting uneasily with wilful individuals, who are predisposed to act themselves out) (Nietzsche, 2007, 13). I found that instructional images, such as those in Figure 6.2, negotiated this discomfort without negating power relations—as they submitted to a test in their promise to prove themselves. This is to say that in the process of following origami instructions I recognized that, as a viewing subject, I relinquished authority because the engagement allowed my ignorance to be objectified. In such encounters, then, agency is happening on the side of the instruction sheet (even though this might invoke the actions of another human being) and the human subject is open to its suggestions (as they offer to restore the ‘rightful’ state of affairs by re-empowering the subject with worldly knowledge). While this might negotiate the ‘problem’ of the subject who might quickly reassume power in the midst of a challenge, I recognized that I could exploit the format for making an intervention consistent with my hypothesis that objects can do the work of process philosophers. Nevertheless, as the philosophical process effect was
understood to lie in the openness of the invite to restore a knowledge imbalance, rather
than its resolution, there was an outstanding issue of holding individuals in the affecting
event, as this was expected to leave them disposed to recognizing the agencies
occurring on the side of the paper instructions themselves. This was perceived to be a
precondition of the process-perspective that I hoped the object would bring about.

The outstanding issue, of how to hold people’s attention, was addressed through the
experimentation with the reproduction of instructions. A further book by Tufte, entitled
Visual Explanations (1997), suggested that many ‘workaday’ writings designed to
instruct novices routinely used images created through the tracing of photographs to
produce particularly clear images which maintain clarity after standard photocopying
procedures (Tufte, 1997, 61). After taking stills from the video that documented a
simple process of folding a piece of heavyweight A4 paper, as many times as I could, I
used a fine ink pen to define significant features for an intended tracing process.
However, whilst this project was executed with the aim of creating the generic images
represented in Figure 6.3, the outcomes that furthered the process (such as the picture
in Figure 6.4, which was one image used in the template for its diagram) were
bequeathed a level of difference, which exceeded the generic format pursued. The
perceived uniqueness seemed to defy the purely referential purpose of instructional
images as it drew my attention to the details of the representation itself.

![Figure 6.4](image)

If subsequent images, such as the one in Figure 6.4, displayed a lack of virtuosity (in
their slavish reproduction of outlines already there) they nevertheless refused dismissal
as ephemera, as they seemed to make the familiar slightly strange (i.e. uncanny). I
recognized this to be an effect born of mimesis, as it holds the subject in the process of
its pursuit of the self (i.e. through the form a recognizable object). Sean Carney has
aligned this with the destabilizing effect of Brecht’s theatre, as it pursues coincidences rather than identity. He suggests that as this invites an assessment of one thing in terms of another it invites a pursuit of complexly paradoxical completeness which distances people from their subjective certainty (Carney, 2005, esp. 18). Carney associates the effect with healing philosophy as he understands that this amounts to the beginning of ‘a larger process that does not end with the shock of [self] estrangement, but instead proceeds on a dialectical path to a new level of greater understanding. It is heuristic and therapeutic’ (Carney, 2005, 18).

I believe the experience to be consistent with Walter Benjamin’s recognition of aura (Benjamin, 1986). Indeed, the latter notion is arguably indicative of a friendship between Brecht and Benjamin which flourished due to their shared interest in the task of awakening human subjects to the matter of themselves (Ezcurra, 2012, online). In its effect, aura amounts to the movement from gaze, towards the stare (introduced in Part 2.1.3), as it has an individual sensing that a view exceeds the objects that might have first caught the subject’s eye. In his essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (which was published in its first version in 1936), Benjamin evokes the important recognition of difference itself, as he defines aura as ‘the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be’ (Benjamin, 1986, 48). Nevertheless, what is experienced is not a simply a quality, but also a lack (in subjective experience) which can be reflected upon for a philosophical engagement with the social world:

If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances […]. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting reproduction. (Benjamin, 1986, 31–32)

Given this, I supposed that as my drawing over the photographic images described an original intervention, so it provided for images that worked on the behalf of their physical presence. It encouraged a unique experience of aura (as this keeps attention engaged with the thing-side of the event)—rather than the subjective experience that might be associated with signs and their references. Moreover, as this process held the
possibility of sustaining critical reflections—which engaged the subject for a reflective review of its world—it is also consistent with the holism pursued by process philosophy.

As Benjamin associated the experience with the ‘fabric’ of art’s traditions, I believed that the generic and auratic would not be opposition in the process of the experiment, if the distinguishing subtleties of an original ink drawing (e.g. the slight impressions made by a pen nib, as it dispenses pigment on paper) could be maintained through the duplicating process (Benjamin, 1986, 32).

Whilst also a matter of performance perspective, it was of significance for the valuation process that as I rotated individual pictures, to assist in the outlining exercise, I experienced changing relationships with the images. It might be clear, from Figure 6.4 that the camera was fixed on a tripod, opposite me, when it recorded the footage of me folding the paper. Given this, its image might be understood to be commensurate with a demonstrative show. But when the image was rotated as in Figure 6.5 below, the effect became quite different.

*Figure 6.5*

Some understanding of the apparent change came through a referral back to the image represented in Figure 1.8, in Part 1.2.2 of this thesis. Oriented as it is above in Figure 6.4, the image reproduced a point of view (POV) that might be associated with the lens of the camera as it occurs at position ‘b’. But turned upside down, as in Figure 6.5, the image represents the site, and sight, of the doer as it is represented the point (at the eye) of POV ‘a’—as the hands occur in a position commensurate with the viewer’s own body. Continuing to work on these ‘upside-down’ images, I found myself being further drawn into the pictures as I defined the depicted paper and the fingers that now seemed doubly mine. On a structural level, this conflicted with the method of the
research represented in Part 1.2—as the latter used the recognition of another subject’s object to begin a disturbance (of a subjective sense of authority). However, in this case I accepted that as the authority of another would be maintained through the instructional format, a qualified level of identity could be deployed. To expand, the research in Part 1.2 depended upon a disputed object which arguably propagated fragmentation. But here, in its concluding stages, the practical element of the thesis was expected to contain the subject in a holistic understanding (and so the recognition of conflict would be counter-productive).

Whilst I understand that my participation in the image-making assisted my identification with its actions, there was nevertheless some recognition of their otherness. The new orientation represented through Figure 6.5 diminished a related level of resistance which might have been associated with the latter. Whilst I detected didactic dimensions in Figure 6.4’s original presentation, when the picture was turned around (as in Figure 6.5) the image appeared more as an invitation to join in because its representation became consistent with a familiar view of my own hands—i.e. as I, myself, tend to see them. This seemed to help to ‘shoe’ me into the depicted event. I assumed this to be a most positive outcome for the intervention, because I believed the effect could mitigate a discomfort that often comes with subjective contests (manifest in the shouts of ‘wanker’ which accompanied Snap, and my own desire for recognition as it explicitly determined the practice in Part 1.1) without effacing the important level of otherness that provides a basis for change. As the combined effect conflated aspects of identity and otherness, its pursuit was perhaps informed by my appreciation of self-portraiture and related experiences of trying to draw myself through a reference to my image in a mirror. If this process included the recognition that I was drawing myself, it also foreshadowed the effect I pursued through the instructions; this is to say that even as it indulged my subjective ‘I’ the process brought a recognizable sense of being objectified with it. Gen Doy has identified this effect in her own address of portrait pictures:

Portait images represent the self for an other of some sort […]. Even if the image is for the patron only […], the sitter is confronted by an image which objectifies her/himself and is never identical with the subject/self of the imaged person […]. Even the self-portrait […] cannot avoid this externalisation and objectification of the self, where the self confronts itself as another while in the process of fabrication. The making self partly constitutes itself through the presence of the image and also through the process of its making. Subjectivity,
its construction and agency, as well as the ultimate impossibility of representing subjectivity, are embodied in portraits.

(Doy, 2005, 36)

What was exploited in the rotation, then, was a capacity to absorb a viewing subject in the presence of the image. I supposed that this might exploit a subject’s identifying process for an effect that could, nevertheless, contribute to the recognition of a scenario (as it is defined in Part 1.0.1).

6.1.4 Performance

The project’s performance dimensions included the activity for camera—which provided for the representative images in Figure 6.6—and the drawing process which produced the instruction sheet in Figure 6.3. They also extended to the delivery process and their anticipated reception by the PhD examiners. In this sense, the work in its entirety might be considered as a distributed performance (i.e. it creates a whole through encounters which are spatially and temporally dispersed).

*Figure 6.6*
Figure 6.6 represents the template for the instructions (in Figure 6.3) which I believed could form the basis of a pictorial invitation to engage in the performance event of folding paper. Nevertheless, it was in their commensurate capacity to represent the authority which is generally assumed by the subject, that I supposed they had potential to create an artefact which could reproduce the work of philosophy. I believed that if this role was foregrounded by my experience of folding the paper and subsequently drawing it, something of its affects could nevertheless be reproduced for others, through the arresting capacities of their representation.

The process represented above (in Figures 6.3 and 6.6), of simply folding a piece of paper, afforded an apparently pointless engagement— which is to say, one which was undistracted by the compulsions of any social world. It also occurred to me that because the representation of this process began with a folding of the paper in two, there was a recognizable tension between the tessellations of the instructional image and those anticipated by the folding itself. If this suggested something of a reversal of Snap’s production—by inviting the disruption of an aesthetically pleasing image—it nevertheless promised something of a cerebral equivalent. To expand, the arrangement of the instructional images reproduced a recognizable format that was threatened (with disruption) by the linear creases of the folding process. As this seemed to resist the temptation to fold the instructions, themselves, so it held some capacity for inertia. I supposed that this could recall Snap’s affect and provide further conditions for some reflection upon the wilful self, happening. As the quote from Dogen (in Part 6.1.2) highlights, this itself might amplify a recognition of the meeting event between people and paper (as existentially significant) even as it positively works with the knowledge of a subjective perspective.

In its anticipated production of an enlightening diagnostic performance— *i.e.* one that engages with the question of what is happening as any instantaneous assimilation is thwarted—the works aim arguably has a structural antecedent in the purpose of heuretic art:

> Heuretic art is the conscious objectification of will, and is so designated because that is what *invention* essentially consists in. This becomes evident when meaning given to the term objectification is recalled. To objectify a volition is not to carry it out in action, but to create a state of affairs in the contemplation of which that volition is reflected back, reimperted to one. The volition which is actually carried out in such creation is another, namely, the volition to objectify the given volition. The mere will-to-objectify-consciously is what we
may call the (endotelic) art-impulse in general, and it is present not only or peculiarly in heuretic art, but equally in aesthetic and lectical art.

(Ducasse, 2004, 120)

Heuretics is often contrasted with hermeneutics, as the latter is understood learn about something whereas the former takes something from the learning process. However, as Ducasse suggests that the aim of heuretics can be identified with lectical art, in its recognition of spirit (or the breath of life), so it might serve as a reminder that hermeneutics is obliged to interpret things in terms which accord with life’s essence. This is because its etymology accepts a need to be adequate to one’s understanding of the pneumatic reference (as explained in Part 5.1.4).

I would suggest that an anticipated lectical process of observing the will happening in experience, through its objectification in an experience’s perspective, inevitably conflates heuretics and hermeneutics to some extent. Indeed, as Ducasse’s reference to ‘lectical art’ accepts that people can come to know what constitutes a process of reading, from the process of reading itself, it arguably overlaps with Nicholas Davey’s vision of philosophical hermeneutics. This recognizes a dynamic loop that can be actualized through aesthetic experience:

Philosophical hermeneutics accepts that understanding is possible, that artworks and texts address us. When artworks ‘speak,’ a truth claim is imposed upon us such that we cannot turn away from it. The power of such claims is that as a consequence of their assertion we cannot turn away from it [...]. What arrests the subject in its experience of art does not lack objectivity. It is the objectivities within the intensities of subjective experience that matter.

(Davey, 2006, 161)

The dynamism, which this anticipates, echoes the ecological events described in Part Five (and Part 5.2.3 especially): experiences I wished to further propagate through the instructional engagement. I say this because the work similarly recognizes what is going on in the environment. I anticipated that the creative experiment discussed in this part of the thesis, and named Fold, had a capacity to bring a process-outlook about, thus putting the event of theoria into the aesthetic effect. This is the happening that occurs between one outlook and another. Davey illuminates its meaning by distinguishing it from theory:
Theory is a mode of ‘subjective conduct’ [...]. It constructs by means of which subjective-consciousness pursues its ‘anonymous domination’ of the environment. Its claims to truth are partial: they fail to reveal the knowledge constitutive interests upon which they rest. The notion of theoria, however, is not an instance of the subject manipulating what is given to it but of experience manipulating the subject.

(Davey, 2006, 26).

In his book Thinker on Stage (1989) Peter Sloterdijk has highlighted the process significance of this experience, as he represents its unfolding event in terms of a derealizing experience which is marked by its openness to impersonal forces. It is in the light of this that Sloterdijk supposes individual beings (including the perceiving human subject itself) can be reconceived as an effect of the self-preservation and self-annihilation tendencies that exist within an object’s challenge (i.e. its perceived otherness) and its identification by a subject (as this works to preserve the latter in the midst of the former) (Sloterdijk, 1989, 15–17, 56). Sloterdijk, writing with some reference to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, understands this event (as it is commensurate with theoria) to afford an exposure to the performance of the cosmos in flux. Given this holistic dimension, he also recognizes that its delimiting determinants (i.e. the material things that challenge, and interpret each other) might be human or non-human in nature (Sloterdijk, 1989, esp.16).

As Sloterdijk reiterates what I had already established through the development of Fold—namely, that engagements with things can reproduce the mind-expanding effects of philosophy—so his book also highlighted that an apparent problem, of theoria’s unfolding being masked in the presence of people, could be readily diminished by allowing non-judgmental (if still interpreting) acting objects to format and direct their material events. This process might be aligned with the paper’s portability which afforded an opportunity for a personal delivery into the private space of the recipients’ offices, and its thinness which allowed me to exploit the gap beneath their respective doors (which secure the privacy of their workplace) in its porous opportunity for paper’s ingress. If this negotiated the problem of social worlds and masks (which I had experienced as inhibiting through the practice described in Part 2.3.1), so it supported the notion that my detection of a philosophical profile for objects could be shared through the distribution of the instruction sheet.

Given that the trip between Plymouth and Dundee allowed for an opportunity to visit Blackpool Pleasure Beach, I stopped en route to Scotland (from Plymouth
University) to pick up my son. During the subsequent train journey, to Blackpool, he confessed to me that my doctoral project, including its underpinning motivations, seemed beyond what he could as yet ‘grasp’. After a brief moment of disappointment and some sombre reflection, I seized upon his appeal to the tangible as a metaphor for understanding, and began to explain my research interest in terms of a paper coffee cup that happened to be on the table in front of us. My ensuing performance of some process-led philosophy was assisted by my adoption of a shamanic persona. This suspended the anxieties about the judgemental perceptions of socialized humans as I primarily identified myself with the force of the cosmos in flux which (in its flow) is always taking us beyond ourselves. Nevertheless, the performance also contributed to my shamanic development as it demanded an engagement which occurred through terms which can be aligned with the social world of humans (even as the pedagogy advanced ideas that I identified with a cosmology.

As I took up the challenge to explain my work I seized on the notion of presence through the paper cup, I raised the object and began by asking my son just what the object that was in front of us might mean for him, and ‘a thing for drinking from’ was the not unreasonable answer. Soon after, and through some basic deconstructing methods, a consensus emerged between us that, on this occasion, the allocated ‘meaning’ was a complex of purpose, history and, as it happened, interpretive anticipation (given that the object had no ‘drink’ in it). Moreover, it was agreed that if the attribution of meaning had been brought about by these ideas of convention, desire and signification, then this was an ideational amalgam that rather overleapt, and perhaps undervalued, the experience of what was physically present to us, though in an admittedly contingent manner, rather than in some wholly abstract way.

With a newly shared awareness that a notion of material presence might precede the designation of meaning, my son and I were soon trying to articulate the coffee cup in terms of a phenomena that we could show and communicate to each other without leaving the material object behind; wherein sensational themes of form, colour, texture, sound and smell (though, oddly, not taste) were privileged. However, as much as we continued to indulge this territory there was a felt sense that the object was becoming almost Martian in its exotic newness. In the subsequent and growing alienation from the object we found it increasingly resistant to generative conversation—and the linguistic translation of the exploratory process slowly tipped into the circular ‘truths’ of tautology (I described the texture of the paper cup as being ‘papery’ at one point). Yet despite the frustrations of expressing this interface between a thing and ourselves, we
could nevertheless agree that the realm had some import, as its apparent limits seemed, paradoxically, to be indistinct from the promise of creativity itself especially as the experience seemed to invite a fresh approach to the question of the cup.

The performance (inasmuch as it was an embodied interpretation of my ideas) developed with some introduction to the relational notion of will to power. A new suspicion of object stasis led to me pointing out that the cup’s apparent lack of motion on the train was actually a function of a shared journey, which is to say that the cup was not stationary but, much like us, moving at some rate. Moreover, I explained the cup was no passive passenger; it had a mass (admittedly small) that was contributing to the train’s momentum as it also resisted the train’s acceleration, wherein one effect—namely the speed to which we were being subjected—was (in some immeasurable way) a result of the cup’s physical presence, which incidentally, also impinged on me (and vice versa). Challenged to revisit the argument from the point where the coffee cup was purchased on the stationary platform, I asked my son to remember that I would still be moving at some velocity through space, a speed which is no less related to a mass (i.e. the earth’s) to which the cup, again, contributes.

What I hoped the scenario (of matter moving, changing and interacting) communicated was not will to power itself (which would be irreducible to any single scenario), but rather some sense that the latter was not a simple causal force which exerts an effect on things. Rather I wanted to communicate an idea that things, as they are impressed upon, are also actively helping to constitute the very phenomena to which they are often understood to be passively subjugated (wherein all things might be understood to be within each other).

This sense of involvement had me reflecting on the notion that my pedagogical presence was helping to make the same train journey that it had appealed to in its philosophizing process. The compelling synchronicity, of physical reference and philosophical message (as it had my son and I involved in creating an object of reference) helped me understand that process philosophy lessens its potential when it operates through economies of reproduction (such as lectures and books) alone. The wider appreciation of this—as it pivots on a recognition of presence as it is described in Part 6.1.1—might bind process philosophy to performance. I might suggest that this is what Jean-Paul Sartre was pointing to when he lamented (in a 1964 interview) that his book Nausea (2000), which arguably sees its hero Roquentin coming to terms with the nothingness described in Part 3.2.4, was merely a symptom and description of what he believed was actually vital, namely ‘a slow apprenticeship with the real’ (Sartre cited in
By delivering the instructions myself, I seized the submission as an opportunity to begin realizing a shamanic role. Encompassing the conveyance process into the Fold project allowed me to instigate the conditions of this and to suggest some personal (if unknown) presence in the work. I maintained a suggestion of this presence, for the recipients, through the personal mode of delivery which patently circumvented any institutionalized postal service through its un-franked arrival through the gap beneath the intended’s office doors. If I hoped the level of understatement would provide for some trace of a presence outside of conventional infrastructures, I also hoped that the exploitation of contingency—i.e. the locked door that might perceived as a device for keeping things out was reconceived as a useful filter (which would allow the ingress of paper as it kept people apart)—would contribute to the healing affects of Fold. These were anticipated to extend to a tragic revision of material culture (as anticipated through Part 1.0.1, and advocated in Part Three), as it accepts the significance of meetings. Walter Benjamin recognized that the maintenance of mystery supports this, as he contrasted the ‘the news of the globe’ with the surprising turn of events that constitute ‘noteworthy stories’ through their exceeding of subjective outlooks:

> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information.

(Benjamin, 2011, 89)

I expected that the surprise of the unannounced arrival of the instruction sheet could encourage a reflection which might operate to provide for something of a reversal of my experience (as it occurred in a fashion consistent with the terms of the RSVP cycle, described in this part’s overview)—less to recover any actual facts of my journey and more to revisit the world in terms of PVSR (i.e. a turnaround of RSVP)—as this works with the presented object to resist ‘meaning-effect’ (i.e. the world as it appears to operate according to a cause and effect model). I hoped this could return history to the event of seeing a thing—in a fashion which was supposed to complete this thesis with a testing of the ‘experiential genealogy’ which first suggested itself (as an appropriate goal) through the work of Part One.
Whilst my exploitation of the PhD format made use of its capacity for division, I nevertheless understood that the recipients of my work would come together for the viva voce. As this intention recognized that the project’s philosophical status would depend on my work’s capacity to create a positive consensus, so it hoped to recover the examination event for the work itself. This conceit was an attempt to make sure that Fold’s lively agency was conspicuously maintained in a situation where it was likely to be talked about, rather than being explicitly acknowledged as happening. On reflection, this plan pre-empted my wilful connection of means and message on the train. It also built a significant level of contingency into the work which recognized the interest in fate which had supported its production. However, as I stated in Part 6.1.3, my internal examiner has since left the university, meaning that the work has appropriately raised the pursued issue of fate in an unexpected way. I say this because I appreciate that Fold’s philosophical efficacy will be judged through two quite different lenses: one being based upon the presence of Fold’s artifact in the process, the other upon its documentary representation through this written volume. Whilst the latter is precisely what I was trying to avoid, my level of ease with the situation might represent the extent to which the project, as a whole, has helped me to develop a strategy to overcome the subject-object divide. As Fiona Jenkins notes, it is in an openness to risk that

we recognize becoming not being at the basis of our lives; for at the root of human agency, and the capacity to transfigure our world, lies a will embedded in, not transcendent of life; and it is existence alone, not an immaculate rationality, which ultimately confers our power of performance.

(Jenkins, 1998, 237)

To summarize, I believe my resistance to the temptation to reproduce the missing element of the thesis—for the new internal examiner—registers a new ease with myself as an effect of events. I say this because it represents an openness to the forces of life as it puts a ground for security at risk. I understand this to be shamanic inasmuch as it leaves me, and my project, disposed to becoming—through our engagement with a human world.
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Chapter 8

“Because I’ve only got Two Hands”: Western Art Undercurrents in the Poses and Gestures of Morrissey

Andrew Cope
“Does the body rule the mind?”

When The Smiths performed ‘Vicar in a Tutu’ on BBC Television’s *The Old Grey Whistle Test* back in May 1986, the band’s “voice”, Morrissey, accompanied the song’s final refrain of “I am a living sign” with a pointed skyward gaze. The sustained pose would become a recurring, and frequently caricatured, feature of the singer’s flirtations with the camera (Figure 8.1). But today the image might be most usefully recalled to present an unusual, but highly significant, aesthetic presence to students of culture (and theatre studies in particular) as the moment captures a performer comfortably astride of two key and enduring perceptual realities, both appreciated as being well subscribed, especially in people’s perception of the body, but each equally understood to be antagonistic towards the other. As such, Morrissey’s simultaneous yet strangely harmonious appeal to the two world-views is as challenging as it is helpfully illustrative, and so fully deserving of scholarly attention.

*The Old Grey Whistle Test*’s studio format located Morrissey in popular music’s secular logics where the emphasis is on style rather than substance. But Morrissey’s mesmerizing conclusion to ‘Vicar in a Tutu’, with its suddenly zealous Christian allusions, seemed to stray into sincerity and conspire with the singer’s historically charged pose to fully invoke the religion’s quite different relationship with embodied messages. In the former, postmodern rationale, the sign’s status is no more than that of a communicative code, which brings about its meaning through a consensus that refers an audience elsewhere; we might agree then, that such a sign de-centres its messenger. However, in the competing religious view, an earthly accord counts for very little as it is an ultimate authority, that of a creator, which guarantees both the sign’s meaning and the signifier’s authenticity. To be “a living sign” in this logic then is to become the sensuous

Figure 8:1: Morrissey’s much-caricatured skyward gaze. Reproduced by kind permission © Andrew Cope (2011).
expression of an absolute reality, and as such an unproblematic exchange of a sign with some kind of inner spirit or essence is assumed to be possible (Davey 1999).

The televised performance of ‘Vicar in a Tutu’ was then an example of Morrissey inviting his audience to follow a trail that leads away from him. Yet the diversion here was acute, as the referral process itself took its onlookers to the idea of access, not only to a message but also to a “doer” behind that message. The persona subsequently produced was both a beguiling paradox and perhaps something of an archetype which could help account for the wider Morrissey phenomenon, it being paradigmatic of the singer’s almost ghostly (as opposed to contrived) public presence, at least insomuch as it managed to outflank, without ever actually denying, the “air of fictionality” which is generally associated with behaviour knowingly twice done (see Pywell 1994: esp. 85).

Morrissey is unlikely to concede the existence of (let alone explain) any stage technique. Indeed, in both conversation and promotion he neatly avoids any decentring, and potentially diminishing, idea of “restored behaviour” (Schechner 2002) by privileging notions of “appearing live” or “in person” rather than performing. But some glimpse into Morrissey’s perception of his own persona might come from a brief interview for The Observer newspaper that occurred during his mid 1990s ‘Boxers’ tour (Bracewell 1995). Tellingly shifting between first and second person, Morrissey discusses his public profile with the author (and fan) Michael Bracewell, declaring that “The sound is too Ortonesque and the voice too absolutely real. I know my music will last.” This seems insightful, not only because ideas of reality and theatre are pushed together (the postmodern concept of “performativity” also does this) but because art is un-problematically identified with the concrete. Wherein concepts of equivocality – notions often deployed by critics to explain the unfamiliarity of the Morrissey phenomenon – whilst not unfounded, seem scarcely sufficient to contain the significant complications (or, to concede something to the religious angle, the profound simplicity) of what is implied: that art, for Morrissey, is the prophetic call of some fundamental reality.

This chapter, then, will address the intriguing physical content and enduring success of Morrissey’s “public” appearances; embodied scenarios that always seem to resist any level of postmodern disenchantment through an appeal to the very same aesthetic tactics that are often associated with the attitude’s scepticism. The anticipated illumination will come from pursuing just some of the parallels that are perceived to exist between Morrissey’s “doing” of the celebrated aspects of his own identity (particularly his performance of gender(s), rebellion and martyrdom) and the stylistic and formal tactics of Western fine art iconography, a longstanding aesthetic project and one which is similarly understood to defy any reductive status of artifice, particularly in the eyes of faithful beholders who tend to see through the affected component of an embodied representation in their deference to its centred and emotionally moving effects.
“Because I've only got Two Hands”: Western Art Undercurrents in the Poses and Gestures of Morrissey

“I look at you and know”

Whilst the Western art tradition of iconography has its origins in the Ancient world’s production of reality, it might be most usefully understood, at least for this academic exercise, as a “conceit” of the later Middle Ages – one which apparently foreshadowed Morrissey through its influential attempts to reconstitute the enchanted and centred exchanges of early Antiquity (with its real statues which were often chained down to prevent them from walking), via acknowledged strategies of representation that managed to maintain some expressive totality, despite the conflicts of its mimetic agenda. And much like the Morrissey phenomenon, such iconography, in presupposing man as God’s image, esteemed and privileged the human figure (and its capacities), alongside narrative, in its production of apparently “authentic” meanings (Baudrillard 1983; Gill 1989).

“Obviously I’m interested in sex” said Morrissey in an interview in 1983 (in conversation with Dave McCullough, for the music paper Sounds). And whilst the singer has rarely been so upfront about his fleshy appetites since, his body has nevertheless been deployed to encourage an audience to privilege a sensual syntax from that which is, in actuality, semiotically open. In one characteristic and quietly seductive image from 1991, later used in a widely disseminated promotional image (Figure 8.2), the artist was captured (by

Figure 8:2: Morrissey poses for photographer Linder Sterling in London’s East End c. 1991. Reproduced by kind permission © Linder Sterling (1991).
photographer Linder Sterling) posing with an outstretched hand on London’s Vallance Road, one-time home of Ronnie and Reggie Kray, those archetypal British figures of a roguish and violent authority (as Power discusses elsewhere in this volume).

The origin of this pose might be traced back to the religious art of later Archaic and early Classical Greece, where a sculpted figure’s outstretched arm would typically be extended towards the viewing position in order to present additional iconography to the faithful (see the replicas of *Athena Parthenos* for instance). And if today we read the posture as a portentous, and perhaps somewhat effeminate gesture, it might be due, at least in part, to the propagation of the pose through the derivative, cultish statues of Antinous, which were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, during the second century AD (Lambert 1997).

By the time the Romans came to copy Greek art, a consistency in Hellene originals, and perhaps a familiarity with the lacuna left behind by iconoclasts, had arguably allowed the outstretched hand to become a representational strategy in itself. So when Emperor Hadrian attempted to elevate the status of his dead lover Antinous, to that of a god, the sedimentary effects of the reaching hand in figurative sculpture were perhaps an evocation enough of the divine pantheon to make any justifying attribute essentially superfluous, an argument that withstands even if a number of the Antinous type would originally have held some attribute to assist with identification. Given this, we might agree that in the case of the propagated Antinous figures, pose had become part of an aesthetic tactic – one that had the useful potential to obscure the interface between the rational world and an illusionary inner world. And in the event, it was arguably the comportment of these statues that helped to transform a much-discussed sexual relationship (with its famously controversial end) between an emperor and a boy into something infallible, rather than contentious and potentially shameful. An aegis that would, in time, come to transfigure the Antique representations of Antinous into an embodied “ideal for the gay ‘uranist’ movement of the nineteenth century which, boasted Oscar Wilde among its ranks” (Cawthorne 2005: 144).

Morrissey, then, seems to appeal to the enchanted meaning of the Antinous form, as an expression of an esteemed sexuality, and deploys it alongside no less centripetal ideas of Classical quality. In Linder Sterling’s poetic outcome, this helped the singer to sustain the romantic reading of the Kray story privileged in his 1989 single ‘Last of the Famous International Playboys’. Moreover, the subsequent double hermeneutic, created through posing in the marginalized situation of Vallance Road, ultimately challenges any gendered stereotypes which might be associated with the mannered body, to usher in an unusual and muscular vision of sensuality – a constitution which was arguably similar to the quirky persona which Morrissey had (in his earlier guise as a writer) attributed to the actor James Dean, who was apparently blessed with the enviable ability to “make good tea, grow geraniums and keep his house spotless without losing any of his obvious masculinity” (Morrissey 1983: 4).

A presentation that attracts then, as it confounds an expectation, and so a pose that would perfectly anticipate the controversial re-inscriptions demanded by Morrissey’s subsequent long player, 1992’s *Your Arsenal*, the sleeve art of which would continue to perpetuate the singer’s confident displays of sensuality, on this occasion through an unbuttoned shirt which
reveals his (credited) appendix scar, an attribute that is itself pictured alongside the control of yet another proud appendage – the artist’s microphone.

Whilst the effects of pose in figurative art have caught people up in its centring meta-fictions for centuries, it is possible to detect the emergence of a familiar and contemporary critical dissent in some later Renaissance examples. Michelangelo da Caravaggio, for instance, apparently recognized that the faith in a centred essence behind a gesture afforded art’s representations of the body an amount of subversive potential. And much as Morrissey, particularly in his explorations of contemporary urban environments, uses pose to enfeeble the boundaries between lived lives and attractive ideals, so Caravaggio’s paintings often used the viewer’s investment in embodied meaning to straddle similar thematic realms.

Although the attributes and elements of the pose in Caravaggio’s painting of The Young Bacchus (c.1596) point to an enchanted authenticity (Figure 8.3), the decaying fruit and the dirty fingernails of the young model are subversive insomuch as they locate any subsequent
veneration in the substance of a prosaic existence (Bolton 2004: 98). Moreover, the wine glass presented by the figure alludes to the Ganymede myth, which in-itself might be read as Classically austere but when it is combined with the subject’s blushing cheeks and the suggestive tug at the belt of his garment, it seems to tempt the viewer and invite his or her flirtation, as much as any fettered academic admiration.

There is further slippage, literally, in the boy’s attire and gaze, which recalls the revealing drapery and languid look associated with the Ancient statues of the ‘Venus Genetrix’ type (see, for example, The Aphrodite of Frejus in the Louvre’s collection). And it is these same embodiments of physical desire that are re-stated in the plummeting necklines and heavy eyelids which Morrissey typically employs both to elevate, and to tease a sensual delight from, locations which have historically been allocated an unexceptional status. A pose which is perhaps best exemplified through Jurgen Teller’s striking image of Morrissey in Battersea, which adorns the reverse side of Bona Drag’s album artwork, where a lamppost appears to be the recipient of a sensual tenderness which scarce few other pop stars would deem warranted by the circumstance.

Ostensibly then, Caravaggio and Morrissey could each be described as straightforward purveyors of traditional iconography, and yet in referring their audiences back to the disenchanted realm of lived life, they democratize the tradition by making once divine and aristocratic ideals universally available. Whilst such appropriation stops well short of iconoclasm (signs being preserved rather than destroyed), there is nevertheless some challenge to the sign’s Antique integrity.

“It has been before, so it shall be again”

Morrissey has often chosen to identify himself with the theme of defiance. On the first European date of 2004’s “comeback” “You are the Quarry” tour, the singer opened the Manchester Arena concert with a few (paraphrased) lines from Paul Anka’s lyrical celebration of single mindedness ‘My Way’, restating a sentiment that Morrissey had visited through his own verse in “Quarry’s” key ballad ‘I’m Not Sorry’. But even in the days of The Smiths, when the singer professed to be enamoured by the gang-like mentality of being in a pop group (implicit in his choice of name for the band), Morrissey’s public body would often be used to privilege the idea of disruption over any notions of unity, with group shots frequently featuring the singer posing significantly differently from the other members of the outfit. And sometimes Morrissey would seem minded to place some distance between himself and his cohorts, on occasion to an extent that seemed to guarantee that the other band members would drift out of the picture’s focus (see Rogan 1994: 117 and 156).

In art history, the advocacy of such individualism is perhaps most closely associated with the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And it was Casper David Friedrich’s image of The Wanderer above the Mists (1818) which came to embody best the idea of the introspective lone figure wrestling with his thoughts, an image
which would itself be inescapably recalled by Morrissey (Figure 8.4) as he posed for Anton Corbijn, photographing for *The Face* magazine, in 1990 (see Slee 1994: 95).

The conflicts between objective and subjective thinking, which defined the Romantic fine art movement, had been ably anticipated in Renaissance iconography, most notably perhaps in Raphael’s fresco of *The School of Athens* (c.1510). The painting depicts a library full of scholars separated by their respective disciplines. And in the middle of the mural is the divisive image of Plato with his student, and proto-scientist, Aristotle (Figure 8.5). Whilst the latter holds his hand parallel with the earth in an appeal for moderation, Plato, who was preoccupied with thoughts of an otherworldly but fundamental reality, points skywards with a gesture that had been employed so much in previous iconography, to direct attention to God’s heavenly dominion (Clark 1969), that it had arguably become symbolic of Christianity itself. And it is this persuasive appeal to an infallible truth that has been a recurring feature of Morrissey’s stage act since the earliest days of *The Smiths*. The formal origins of the pose might be traced back to Roman antiquity where sculptors would privilege the subject’s ability to command by friezing an outstretched arm gesture,

Figure 8.4: The lone figure of Casper David Friedrich’s *The Wanderer above the Mists* (right) as it was recalled by Morrissey (left) as he posed for *The Face*. Reproduced by kind permission © Andrew Cope (2011).
known as the *adlocutio*, which would typically precede a statesman's address to the army (Pollitt 1993: 246).

In Ancient art the pointing gesture is perhaps most closely associated with the first century BC Augustus statue of the Prima Porta. Augustus (Octavius) was the first Roman Emperor proper, and such sculptures were central to the persuasive art project that was intended to affirm his disputed right to rule. In the nineteenth century, artist Jacques-Louis David, a neo-classicist who quite openly tended to borrow poses for his subjects from other works of art, would famously use the same outstretched arm, pointing skywards, in his 1801 depiction of the new hero of revolutionaries – First Consul Bonaparte, the gesture's appeal to the idea of fidelity arguably helping to give Napoleon's image the public importance of a political manifesto (Clark 1973: 26). But the Antique precedent also allowed David to anticipate Napoleon's imperial ambitions. We might agree then that in the realm of art, knowing might be said to be indistinct from copying; yet knowledge might also facilitate an amount of play which can, at least in effect, give artworks some level of agency (Schwartz 2000: 246).

The emotional impact of the sanguine outstretched arm was not wasted on those artists who sought to influence opinion in the twentieth century. Representations of Lenin for instance would typically show the leader of the proletariat recalling the poses of an art past. But significantly, in early images of the revolutionary leader, his arm is rarely raised skywards. Instead, his hand tended to hover level with the earth, echoing Aristotle's moderating gesture and perhaps Karl Marx's earthbound philosophy. However the passing of time can dull a population's appetite for change and to maintain impetus, rhetoric needs to become

![Figure 8.5: The contrasting figures of Plato (left) and Aristotle, which take a central position in Raphael's School of Athens fresco. Reproduced by kind permission © Andrew Cope (2011).](image)
increasingly motivated, explaining why, in later imagery, Lenin's arm would become more elevated and his frame increasingly inclined, suggesting a growing momentum towards some metaphorical future (Gombrich 2002; Hobsbawm 2002: esp. illustration 5).

It is perhaps no accident then that Morrissey leans into a pointing outstretched arm on the sleeve of his 2005 DVD *Who put the M in Manchester?* Following a seven-year recording hiatus, the video captures a performer who was understandably eager to convince the world of the continuing relevance of the future envisioned in a playlist which included more established material, such as 'Shoplifters Of The World Unite', alongside new and no less inflammatory songs like 'Irish Blood, English Heart' which urges its listeners to "denounce […] [Britain's] royal line". Yet, whilst it is the faith in stable signs that has granted Morrissey some subversive success, the seditious tactic has meant that he inevitably upholds much of a sign's supporting apparatus in the moment of its critique (after Walter Benjamin cited in Huxley 1998: 277).

In one illuminating defence of his controversial use of imperial imagery at 1992’s Finsbury Park appearance (for more on “Madstock” see the contributions elsewhere in this volume by Baker), Morrissey wrestled with the paradoxes innate in his performance by explaining that he “didn't invent the Union Jack, you do realise that don't you? I didn't knock it up on a spinning wheel in the front room. I can't account for other people's reactions […] I think it happened [the subsequent furore] because it was time to get old Mozzer” (Morrissey in conversation with Stuart Maconie 1995). In explaining the decentred character of the deployed emblem negatively (“I didn't invent […] I can't account”), Morrissey’s assessment never alights on anything, and so could scarcely have been more in tune with the (potentially exonerating) fall of presence generally attributed to postmodern performances. Yet it is also as if Morrissey strangely meets himself when he is coming back from his own aesthetic diversions as he appears resigned, and perhaps even fated, to the objectifying consequence of being conditioned by the processes of iconography (after Butler 1999).

The artist himself then, would perhaps concede that his deployment of symbols, whilst not without humour and ultimately centrifugal, nevertheless thoroughly catches him up, and so ostensibly implicates him, in webs that are not of his making; a tragedy that perhaps underpins the (much misunderstood) aspect of Morrissey that is at once in awe of and enamoured by unsophisticated street crime and thuggish loutishness – behaviour he once described as “a great art form, which I can't even aspire to” (Morrissey cited in Parsons 1993).

**“Learn to love me, assemble the ways”**

Although the hegemonic aspects of Morrissey’s decentring gestures may have left him exposed to an unmatched level of disapproving scrutiny, their centripetal effects have come to his rescue by defusing the damaging potential of his detractors’ maligning critiques. In the fallouts which have succeeded his controversies, Morrissey has typically staged victim-as-martyr scenarios that are themselves reliant on the rhetorical agency of Christian art’s
representations – emotive iconography that inevitably shores-up the objective status of the righteous victim.

 Barely a year after the release of The Smiths’ first album, NME journalist Danny Kelly detected that the singer’s “fountain of pronouncements […] [had] started to grate” (Kelly 1985). In the subsequent interview, Morrissey apparently pitied his detractors, saying “They’ve lost faith”. And the artist would recall the Christian model once more on the music weekly’s cover which featured a clearly pleased Morrissey recreating the glowing and smiling Jesus of Matthias Grunewald’s *Resurrection* image from around 1515.

 The divinity of Jesus in Grunewald’s sixteenth century painting is intended to resist doubt, as viewers witness the emergence of the Christ figure from the tomb. Likewise Morrissey, when confronted with suspicion, chose to restage the most enchanted moment of the Passion’s narrative, which was designed to restore faith in the hearts of those with failing conviction. Whilst the NME image was primarily a parody, it nevertheless helped to both signpost and consolidate Morrissey’s previous dalliances with the Christian art precedence. Stigmata, such as National Health Service spectacles, hearing aids and of course flowers, had already come to define the singer’s public appearances; such “outings” apparently becoming opportunities for Morrissey to both venerate identities which were generally considered wretched, and to usefully mask the absence of any centred Morrissey persona in the process – flamboyantly fulfilling an aesthetic purpose which could be said to be indistinct from the two primary objectives of Christian iconography, at least as postmodern theory understands it (after Baudrillard 1983). Such practices of magical sympathy remain commonplace even in contemporary fine art. However, lest anyone forget, Morrissey is occasionally disposed to re-state the religious origins of such metamorphoses through his lyrics, most notably perhaps in ‘Bigmouth Strikes Again’, when he transports his hearing aid to fifteenth-century France in order to affiliate (or “melt”) the object with the fiery scene of Saint Joan of Arc’s public torching.

 The allusion to sainthood, and particularly the relic which becomes radiant in the presence of belief, was furthered when Morrissey launched his solo career. Whilst the artwork of The Smiths’ recording catalogue typically “starred” those actors from stage and screen who had captured the young Morrissey’s imagination, subsequent releases would, by and large, frame only his chiselled features (as Connor demonstrates elsewhere in this volume). And much as a relic’s fragmentation helped to maximize the dispersal of a saint’s essence in the Christian tradition, so the reproduction of a record’s picture sleeve would come to facilitate the widest distribution of Morrissey’s signified proximity.

 The extraordinary added-value provided by the photographed pose to Morrissey’s own phenomenon might be registered in the fans’ relationship with the gates of Salford Lad’s Club which framed The Smiths on the inside of *The Queen is Dead*’s gatefold sleeve. Today, organizers facilitate a level of adoration through guided coach tours that take “pilgrims” to the red-bricked locale. And fans in high places seek to claim something of the institution’s “enchanted” power by either attempting to recreate Morrissey’s original composition for some subsequent dissemination; or by protecting its esoteric potential through attempting
to regulate the amount of access that an adversary might have to the venue (see Woolf 2008), evidence, perhaps, of Morrissey’s unrivalled and almost Midas-like ability to tease the precious from the prosaic (see also the chapter by Erin Hazard in this volume).

Morrissey signposted some readiness to accept the singular role of a quasi-religious icon through the artwork of his debut solo release, 1988’s ‘Suedehead’, where the artist brandished an assertive elbow to demonstrate his willingness to collect veneration. It was a gesture that had frequently been employed in Dutch depictions of military leaders in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see, for example, *The Laughing Cavalier* [c.1624] by Frans Hals), where the encroaching elbow would represent an army’s struggle to extend and unify territory by claiming additional picture space (Spicer 1991: 97). In ‘Suedehead’s artwork an angle similarly nudges beyond the limits of the picture, suggesting that there is now no longer room for anyone else. And with this job done, Morrissey was free to directly emulate images of the divine on the cover of his subsequent long player.

In *Viva Hate*’s portrait photograph, Morrissey’s features are bathed in light, recalling the luminous face that, in Renaissance iconography, often identified the Christ figure: A supposed sacred “glow” that the painter Albrecht Durer had previously borrowed to give a divine spin to his essentially secular self-portrait in 1500 (Spalding 2005: 207). But Morrissey’s appeal to the devotional tradition is arguably more committed and particular
Morrissey

than Durer’s earthly appropriation, as the singer’s head falls forward, and tilts slightly to one side (whilst his languid eyes avoid the viewer’s gaze) to revisit an influential composition associated with the most important aspect of the Passion (Figure 8.6).

When, in the period between 1300 and 1500, devotion ceased to be a purely public matter and became a domestic obligation as well, it was in a guise similar to the Viva Hate image, known to art historians as “The Man of Sorrows”, that Jesus entered the home; with his head tipped to one side, stressing the weight of a very human body, and the eyes just slightly open to demonstrate a divine triumph over death. Richard Harries, the forty-first Bishop of Oxford, described the embodiment (as it occurred in iconography) as “the most precise visual expression of late mediaeval piety”, adding that it was designed to “bring image and viewer together with a religious intensity that has rarely been surpassed” (Harries 2004: 85). It is a “piety” that perhaps helps the occidental eye to overcome the staginess of the pose by subsuming any missionary zeal (that might be associated with the picture’s dissemination and display) beneath the ideas of “good” and “natural” that in Christian art were supposed to be understood as inevitable givens, rather than discursively produced meanings.

A more universal convention in iconography, associated with the Classical imperatives of the Grand Manner, proscribed distorted facial features from appearing in any representations of nobility. This meant that however grave the circumstance or immanent the threat, suffering in the convention’s imagery always had to be shown as an almost nonchalant form of endurance (Hagan and Hagan 2000: 121). A tradition tested on the sleeve art of ‘You Have Killed Me’ where an impassive and impressively attired Morrissey lies across a set of train tracks, stoically awaiting the arrival of the inevitable (see also the chapter by Melissa Connor). Much then as the pain of Jesus is accepted in iconography without being abject, suffering in Morrissey’s Viva Hate portrait, and the folio of its subsequent legacy, is never laboured and only ever exists thanks to the extraneous signifiers that bind the artist’s features to ideas of torment.

In the visual arts of the early twentieth century, the painter Egon Schiele had anticipated Morrissey’s appropriation of Christianity’s visual strategy by advancing Albrecht Durer’s pious allusions and displacing religious signs (and their reception) into entirely secular contexts. In one promotional image for an exhibition at the Arnot Gallery (Vienna) in 1914, Schiele assumed the pose of Sebastian stoically absorbing his arrows (Figure 8.7), and Morrissey would adopt a similar comport on the cover of his Kill Uncle release. And so, whilst both Morrissey and Schiele doubtlessly intended to evoke symbols of painful martyrdom, there is also, in mocking the sacred, an amount of transgression, perhaps fuelled by the knowledge that their torturers all too often purport to be the agents of God (Whitford 1993). A clearly painful tension was previously addressed by Morrissey in the lyrics of his song ‘Yes I Am Blind’ where the singer struggles to come to terms with the eagerness of the devout to kill, then cook and devour the very symbol of Christ on earth, the lamb.

Ultimately then, the suffering Morrissey communicates is the wretchedness of the vanquished which – in an ironic yet inevitable fate, that has befallen on many of his own outsider heroes – keeps propelling him towards, rather than away from, an institution which
he often contests. Nevertheless, the historical “sense” that always matches and complements Morrissey’s historical knowledge gives him some scope to register and strategically exploit elements of the tradition’s narrative (and emotional appeal) without being entirely subsumed or lost beneath the weight of its meanings.

Typical are the artist’s evocations of Michelangelo’s Dying Captive (Figure 8.8). It is a recurring form in Morrissey’s repertoire of poses and one which allows the singer to read his own needs and poetic aspirations into a trusted symbol of both the Renaissance’s metaphysical foundations, and its classical quality. History deems that the pose signifies anguish, but Morrissey has used his own contemporary story and context to privilege nuanced subtexts. For instance, on the sleeve of his Live in Dallas DVD (previously an NME cover image) Morrissey takes full advantage of the opportunity that the pose provides for displaying his hairless physique – and in doing so the singer simultaneously asserts some fidelity to an Antique precedence, whilst complicating the meaning by appealing to its modern relationships with ideas of innocence and prepubescent powerlessness. Sexuality and notions of purity are thus embroiled into the circumstance to usefully collude with, rather than simply distract from, the disapproval of his antagonists. And such aesthetic

Figure 8:7: The pose adopted by Egon Schiele for his self-portraits as a Saint Sebastian figure impaled by arrows. Reproduced by kind permission © Andrew Cope (2011).
tactics have arguably helped Morrissey to constitute, and feed, the fiercely protective attitude that shoots right through the scene that has grown up around him.

Morrissey's live appearances have subsequently become characterized by a contagious enthusiasm that often tips into a religious fever, leading Michael Bracewell to describe such fanatical events in terms of “the inexplicable being pursued by the insatiable” (Bracewell in Sterling 1992: 1). So, whilst Morrissey's shows are undoubtedly entertaining, his touring also seems to provide an opportunity for his following to satisfy a palpable thirst for some intimacy with their hero. A need that the singer clearly anticipates and tries to answer from his elevated stage position (which in the live context seems to help the singer transcend his human frame, and affirm his ascendance to some canonized status) by frequently extending an open palm out above the crowd (Figure 8.9), an inviting presentation that is itself met by a flock of yearning hands, each seeming to belong to a suddenly stifled soul, temporarily frozen in gesture and apparently waiting (not unlike Michelangelo's languishing figure of Adam as it is painted on the Sistine Chapel ceiling) to receive some kind of regenerative release through the fingertips of life's authentic source.

It is perhaps this experience above all then – a happening that seems to embody and exemplify both the lone and the gregarious aspects of existence – that takes the Morrissey
phenomenon through, yet beyond, the ambivalent status of irony (appropriate for postmodern purists, such as David Bowie, who knowingly exploit but never exceed pop’s plastic quality) and towards some much more cathartic and culturally significant mimetic contract – one which might yet come to make Morrissey’s claim for some earthbound martyrdom seem, if anything, a little understated.

Nature is a language, can’t you read?

(Morrissey, ‘Ask’, 1986)

References

Morrissey


