

Equally Empty

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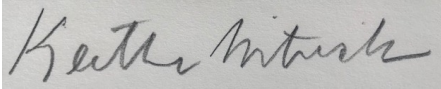
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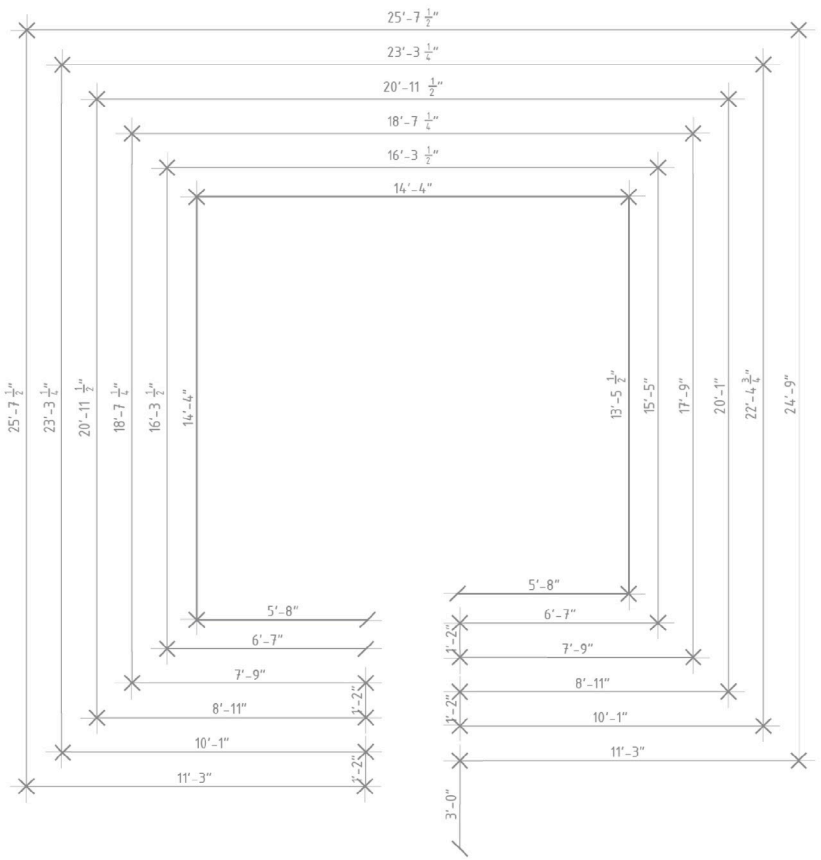


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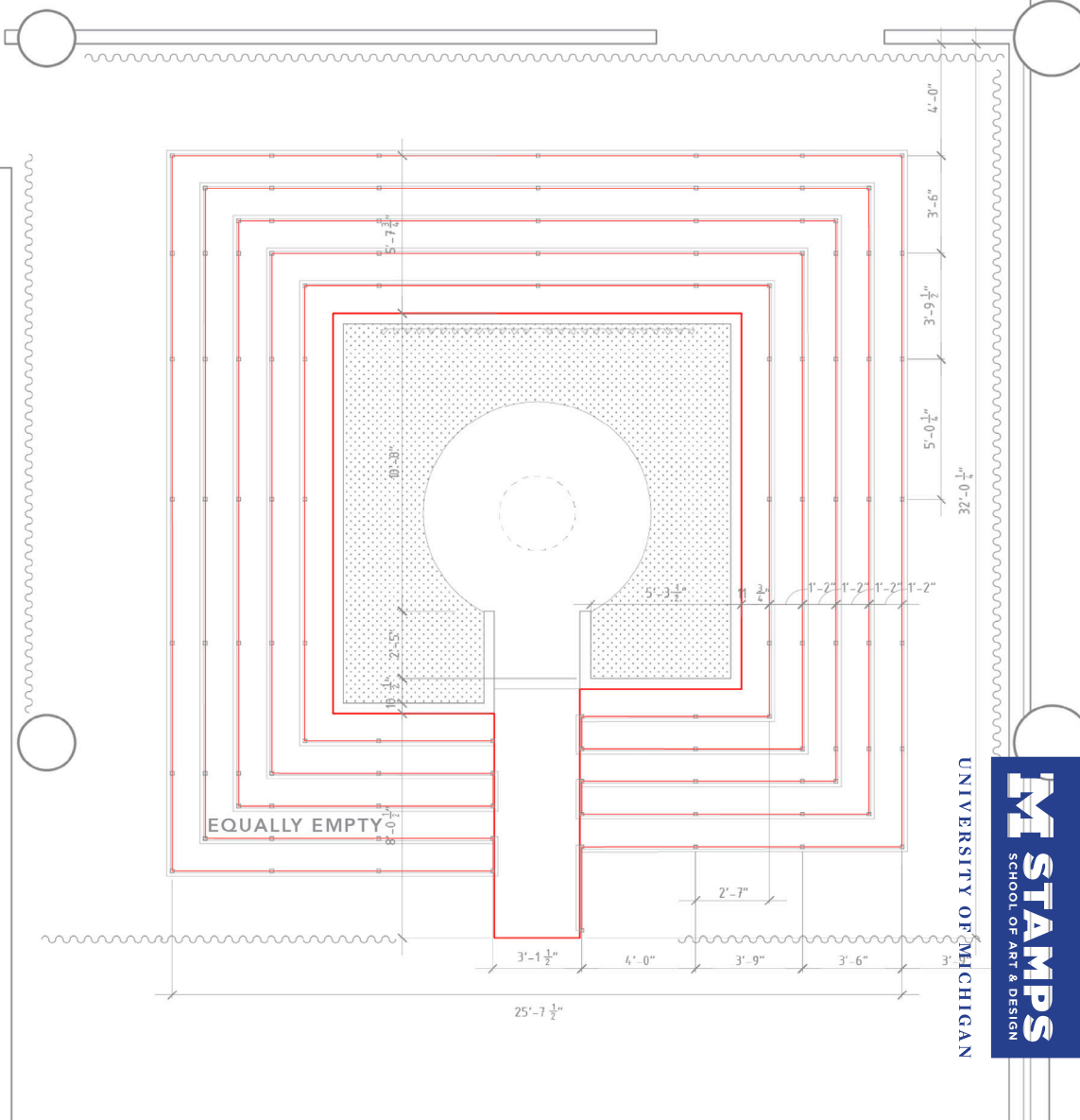


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Abstract

Categories of spatial experience and inner experience are explored through an inquiry into phenomenology, phenomenal art, spatial theory, contemplative practice, and eastern philosophy. An intuitive research process guides the creative practice as it materializes as immersive and sensorial installation and sculpture. The creative work is centered in the embodied perception of space and awareness of self. Perception is heightened by elements such as sound, light, and a sculptural environment. The aesthetic and archetypal form of the labyrinth and its paradoxicality, is contemplated philosophically and physically through readings and renderings. The space within a drawing of a labyrinth is transposed into a space which the viewer may enter into. The drawing of an artist momentarily assumes the role of proposal drawing for another artist's installation. This relationship between the artist's drawing and another artist's space are reimagined in an expanded field. One's creative work becomes a platform to contemplate and make space for the work of others. A sculptural object becomes a hybrid of another artist's processes or a meditation on the connection between language, drawing, and sculpture.

Keywords

Space, spatial, spaciousness, phenomenal, phenomenology, conditional art, site-determined, site-based, site-specific, interstitial, hybrid, transformative, emotive, meditative, eastern philosophy, inner experience, awareness of self, enigmatic, transpose, drawing, plan drawing, proposal drawing, sculpture, immersive, installation, direct experience, sonic, sound, soundscape, score, sensorial, kinesthetic, proprioceptive, ethereal, embodied, experience, environment, emptiness, void, collaborative, making space, artist book, album, architectural, language, Gordon Matta-Clark, index card note, cut drawing, cut building, corridor, labyrinth.

Preface

The document you have before you at first glance may seem verbose and perhaps overly comprehensive. However, there is an inherent meaning to the longform prose you are about to behold. I was quite adamant about meeting all criteria that should be present in this writing, however I went about it in a way which diverges from what might be considered to be a concise approach to this task. As the researcher and artist who is presenting my graduate work in writing, I feel compelled to make space for my work to exist. In my Contextual Review, for instance, I present and elaborate on essential art precedent and theories which have informed my research. While doing this I made the discovery that it was important for me to take a deep dive into these works and inhabit those spaces in language. I have chosen to embody the work I am presenting in poetic passages which are able to capture these experiential encounters with both the work of others I present and my own. In the process of writing these spatial narratives the thesis paper itself has become integral to my creative practice, and has indeed become a creative work in itself. This process continues through the paper and runs through all the sections and into the Conclusion section. I ask the reader of this document to be mindful of these intentions, and to allow themselves to be carried along by this exercise in ekphrasis. The seemingly labyrinthine paths which the narrative explores are actually unicursal in nature, they are all leading to the heart of the experience of my research and creative work.



INTRODUCTION



I went on a circuitous family trip in an RV when I was 11 years of age. It was my brother and I, six cousins who were all fairly close in age, a few aunts and uncles, and my Gram and Gramdad. It was the summer of 1987, we began the journey after a few days visiting my aunt Bunny and uncle Tip at their home in Española, New Mexico, just outside of Santa Fe. We loaded up into the RV and were on the road for a few weeks visiting National Parks and some historical sites. The trip culminated with a week-long stay at the Grand Canyon where everyone from the

RV voyage met up with a handful of parents who drove out to meet us there. Before arriving at the Grand Canyon, we had stopped at and explored a number of places including Four Corners Monument, Bryce Canyon, and Zion National Park, earlier in the trip we visited Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico. Needless to say, we had seen and experienced some phenomenally staggering natural and historical wonders. Yet, the experience which had a life altering significance for me was at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico.

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I have a memory of taking a utility elevator a few hundred feet below the surface and once we descended into the caverns, I remember a feeling of awe beginning to descend upon my body. I felt strangely enlivened and could feel the space around me, the subterranean coolness of the caverns only heightened this otherworldly sensation. Somehow, I intuitively knew that this kinesthetic feeling would somehow hold an importance for me later on. I somehow intuited that this experience would become a touchstone in my life. I felt no need to speak

or share the experience, it felt more significant to let this feeling just emanate within. I recall walking ahead of the group or lagging behind just enough to attune to the space more fully. The inverted forests of calcite speleothems, cascading mineral draperies, ribbons and curtains of dissolved limestone, the totemic and talismanic stalagmites and stalactites all added perceptual layers to the experience of unfathomable voids of the caverns. I remember the enormity of the fungi shaped stalagmites which protrude from the floor toward the showers of melted mineral chandeliers while the pools on the cave's floor mirrored these geological geometries exponentially. We ended the day by watching a multitude of bats emerge at sunset from the cavern's natural entrance. I was transfixed by that as well, yet it was the experience I had underground that day which has never left me; which I continue to go back to over three decades later. My interest in immersive spatial installations is indebted to this experience in the summer of 1987.

My MFA Thesis Exhibition *Equally Empty* was made with the very same awareness of transformative spatial experience. In this project I allow a drawing by another artist to assume the role of proposal for the spatial installation I created. This drawing which is the progenitor of the project is elegantly framed and on the back wall, there is also an artist book which sits upon a podium lit by UV light in the space. I constructed a series of labyrinth passageways which surround a structure at the center of the installation. The central enclosure of *Equally Empty* is a cave-like and meditative space which is activated by light and sound. It is a hybrid of a sanctuary of the built-world and a natural and fecund environment such as a cavern. The inner sanctum and the kinesthetic perception the viewer is able to have within, is directly informed by this experience of *feeling* the interior chambers of Carlsbad Caverns as a boy of eleven.

The intuitive research which guides my creative practice produces research questions which dovetail into one another, much like the phases of my methodological cycle itself. The starting point of this intuitive

research process began with an inquiry into the embodied experience of space which integrates my readings in phenomenology and eastern philosophy. My contemplative practice of sitting meditation also has a prominent influence on my research and creative practice. As this inquiry unfolded, I realized that there was a connection between spatial experience and awareness of self. The formal two-fold question is this:

How may an embodied encounter in a phenomenally articulated space induce a heightened state of mind, body, and spirit? How can this allow for an expanded understanding of transformative spatial experience and awareness of self?

During the course of my two-year MFA program, many of my projects leading up to my Thesis Exhibition were large-scale sculptural installations. I focused on creating spaces meant for an embodied experience by the viewer. Some of the projects transformed the entire environment and attempted to induce a profound spatial experience, while others situated themselves in the site and my sculptural response took its cues from the surroundings. My previous projects functioned as predecessors in this intuitive research process and each of these works led into one another and allowed for an expanded understanding of spatial experience as it relates to inner experience.

My intuitive research process initiates, improvises, and guides in a way that insight and inquiry fall into place so that the research and work align. I respond to my first set of research questions most directly with a space which I refer to as the inner sanctum, which lies within *Equally Empty*, my MFA Thesis Exhibition. The locus of the viewer's experience in this installation occurs when crossing the threshold of the architectural enclosure at the center of the labyrinth to enter a dimly lit sculptural environment and bathe in ethereal sound and radiant light. This inner sanctum is a sensorial and transformative space, allowing the perceiver to navigate not only this enigmatic interior, but also their own sense of self.

In the Fall of 2019, I came across an image of a graphite drawing of a labyrinth by the SF Bay Area-based artist Dean Smith. I was immediately taken by this image and had a desire to build it. I already had an ongoing interest in labyrinths, and the labyrinth in this drawing somehow articulated everything I was searching for in the form, or rather the space within the form. I then contacted this artist and asked if he would be open to me constructing an immersive installation based on the space he imagined in his graphite drawing. Dean Smith was flattered by my interest in his work and agreed for his drawing to be the catalyst for the installation. This leads us to the second two-fold research question:

In what ways are labyrinths able to embody the inner experience of spiritual journey and transformation, as well as that of confusion and disorientation? How may an artist's engagement with the paradox of the labyrinth allow for further insight into this archetypal and aesthetic form?

I began to research labyrinths and and more importantly, contemporary artists' engagement with this archetypal and aesthetic form. While looking at the spectrum of experience which a labyrinth may embody, I became interested in the possibility of creating a space which could perform as a meditative and transformative space while also being able to induce a sense of disorientation. The labyrinth which I was building was also materializing a space which was imagined by a drawing by another artist, making his drawing into a proposal drawing for a sculpture. This brings us to the third two-fold research question:

If an artist was to allow another artist's drawing to assume the role of proposal drawing for their own immersive space, how could they then reimagine the relationship of drawing and space? What latent possibilities could emerge by transgressing this typically imposed boundary between one artist's drawing and another artist's space?

I had gone outside of myself to find a drawing in the world which would assume the role of proposal drawing for a space I was making. By doing this I was able to transpose a space which is imagined by a drawing of a labyrinth into an immersive space which one could enter into. Typically, there are boundaries between one artist's proposal drawing and another artist's space. I was interested in transgressing this boundary, in hopes of gaining new knowledge around ways we can reimagine this relationship in an expanded field. The final research question I am introducing has similar concerns except it is considering unconventional collaboration with artists outside the context of the proposal drawing:

How can making space for the work of other artists in one's creative work expand the field of artmaking?

As my intuitive research and creative work progressed, I realized that I was making space for other artists within my own work. I was enacting this in a number of ways, and it had indeed become an important aspect of *Equally Empty*. The installation's origin arose from the drawing *untitled* by Dean Smith. I also worked collaboratively with the sonic artist Emmerich Anklam, who made the sound for my installation; the inner sanctum houses and makes space for the aural perception of Emmerich Anklam's ambient score. An *Equally Empty* album was also released as part of my MFA Thesis Exhibition which was another platform which made space for Emmerich Anklam's work, along with my reading of the poem *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*, which is composed of text by the artist Gordon Matta-Clark.

The *Equally Empty* artist book was another platform for me to both collaborate and make space for other artists in my work. The book included two texts, the first piece is a speculative and enigmatic prose poem by the artist Dean Smith titled *The Tunnel*. The second work is the text of the poem *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*, which is transcribed from the aphoristic and poetic index card notes of Gordon Matta-Clark. The illustrations, the print design, and the printing were all done by other artists. I was simply the artistic director of the project,

and transcribed and arranged the Matta-Clark text after garnering permission from the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark. There is a chorus of artist's voices within this book. The sculpture in my Thesis Exhibition titled *MAKING THE RIGHT CUT* also transposes a particular index card of Matta-Clark into a sculptural object. This work becomes a hybrid materialization of the artist's cut drawing and index card note practice. Every layer and aspect of *Equally Empty* is also responsive to the research questions I've just presented. The creative work arises from these inquiries and in turn the questions themselves were shifted to align with the work.



CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

About the Contextual Review

This chapter is divided into three main sections, some with supporting subsections. The first main section of the Contextual Review is *Species of Spaces*. This section will contextualize my three areas of inquiry into embodied spatial experience in direct relation to my creative work. These areas of enquiry are: *Phenomenal Space*, *Transformative Space*, and *Emotive Space*. The second main section *The Paradox of*



the Labyrinth has one subsection, *Artists Imagine the Labyrinth*, which will contextualize two artist's engagement with this archetypal form and its paradox, as it relates to my own engagement. The third main section *Drawing in Space* consists of two supporting subsections, the first, *Allowing a Drawing to Assume the Role of Proposal for Sculpture* will contextualize my use of a drawing by the artist Dean Smith as a plan for my MFA Thesis installation *Equally Empty*. The second subsection is *Drawing In-Between: The Cut Drawings and Index Card Notes*

of Gordon Matta-Clark. This subsection will contextualize my artistic engagement with two of the artist Gordon Matta-Clark's unique adjacent drawing forms. These are his cut drawings, which the artist drew by rendering marks as absences into stacks of paper. The second quasi-drawing form we'll examine will be the index card notes, which were an interstitial platform for the artist to experiment with language and map out his spatial research. The three spatial experiences we will explore in the first main section, the paradoxical labyrinth, and the section on drawing in space will all fold into one another as we traverse these lines of inquiry which inevitably lead us into my Methodology, Creative Work, and Conclusion. Other artists' work will continue to be meditated upon in all of these sections, and my voice and relentless inquiry will be the common thread which binds the overarching narrative.

I. Species of Spaces: Phenomenal Space, Transformative Space, and Emotive Space

1. Phenomenal Space

Our body is not in space like things, it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand on an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments as if by magic, since it is ours and because through it we have direct access to space. For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions. Even our most secretive affective movements, those most deeply tied to the humoral infrastructure, help to shape our perception of things.¹

–Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In a participant's engagement with a sculptural installation, the viewing experience is durational and immersive. This interaction is framed by the perceptual and sensorial encounter one has with the work. Of all the contemporary artists one may come across who are focused on embodied spatial experience, Robert Irwin exemplifies the kind of artist who allows the processes of seeing and experiencing to navigate the reception of the art experience.

Robert Irwin, who is best known as a “light and space” artist, has spent most of his art career experimenting, theorizing, and discovering new modes of perception. Art Historian Matthew Sims comments here on

the intentions and perceptual patience of Irwin's unique approach to his conditional art:

Irwin is interested in the novel perceptions and an expanded range of aesthetic attention. Irwin's conditional art, therefore, is ultimately against conditioning—that is, it seeks to generate opportunities for perceiving and thinking anew, without the cramping effect of built-up prejudice, habit, or convention. If Irwin favors simply spending time “attending,” or “running his senses over the possibilities,” and even setting aside conceptual understanding “for a time,” it is in order to court the constant originality inherent within sensory and perceptual experience, opening as it does onto a potentially unceasing stream of what he terms “new and novel human perceptions.”²

Prior to the 1970s Irwin had begun to encroach upon the shift toward conditional art, the term first used for this practice was “art-in-response,” which soon after changed to conditional or site-conditioned art. These terms refer to the concept of allowing the space or site to help determine and even guide the realization of the work. This shift in the artist's practice was partly due to certain sacrifices he made around that time. Irwin explains in an interview with painter Fredrick Wight his decision in 1970 to shutter his Market Street art studio in Venice, Ca., choosing to abandon all it symbolized in terms of accumulated knowledge, resources, and methods of working: “What I did was the simplest kind of thing...and that was to get rid of all those habits and practices. I cut the knot...I got rid of the studio, sold all the things I owned, all the equipment, all my stuff; and...I simply stopped being an artist in those senses.”³ (See Fig.1)

After this relinquishment, Robert Irwin embarked on a journey which proved to be the start of a new way of seeing and approaching art, and this required a new way of making. It was at this moment that the artist focused on making temporary installations which subtly intervened within the spatial contexts of the galleries and museums. At this point,



Figure 1. Robert Irwin in his studio. Venice, Ca., 1970.

the choice of materials shifted to those that were minimal in weight, yet of maximal perceptual impact. He did this by utilizing string, wire, scrim, plasterboard, glass, and most importantly light—both natural and artificial. The resultant installations were deft and meticulous responses to the aesthetic conditions inherent to the sites themselves, whether in art spaces, hallways, or utility staircases.

The material which became a common denominator to many of the conditional installations which began to commence in 1970 is referred to by the artist as 'scrim'. A white semi-transparent textile, it became iconic in the art world because of its deployment by Irwin. Scrim can create an ambiguity by masking existing architecture and space, while capturing illumination. Irwin had first stumbled upon this unique fabric in the latter part of 1969 while he was at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, installing a selection of his disc paintings. Irwin relates the story of this discovery of scrim to art historian and writer Craig Adcock:

I saw the scrim material there [in Holland]. They were using it for curtains on windows, and I loved the way it affected the light. Anyway, I saw this material, and I thought it was very beautiful. I also saw it as a sort of ceiling baffle. There was a band around it, and it was stretched like a tarpaulin. It was used to direct and balance interior light.⁴

Art critic and writer Lawrence Weschler adds: “What particularly fascinated Irwin in the scrim material was its capacity to give shape, as it were, to light. The material was transparent and yet not quite—light seemed to catch in the interstices, to catch and hold, to take on volume.” Irwin’s use of this key material proved to be an ideal means of re-shaping space and light to create ensembles for spatial encounter. There was no dependence on objecthood or reliance on previous approaches to the alteration of space. Weschler summarizes the infinitude of possibilities that this scrim material ushered in for the artist:

Its possibilities seemed unlimited. For a show at the Pace Gallery in New York for example, Irwin stretched a taut “soft wall” of the material, floor to ceiling, twenty-four inches in front of and parallel to the rear gallery wall. At the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Irwin contrived *Slant Light Volume* at the far end of a low and wide, dark hall by stretching a sheer scrim at an angle of roughly 45 degrees from the ceiling, away from the viewer, toward the floor, and then allowing an intense white light to fall on the far side. There were countless other scrim modulations, but they all shared in this eerie effect of somehow rendering light palpable.⁵

Part of the evolution of Irwin’s thinking during this time was to visualize and conceive his ongoing art activities volumetrically. *Untitled (Slant Light Volume)*, 1971 was an early work along these lines, which led to many permutations thereafter. Matthew Simms comments on the viewer’s engagement with this work in real time and space:

Images of people visiting Slant Light Volume inevitably show them up close, either standing or looking in the direction of the field of materialized cool illumination. But the view from afar was equally effective, since, at this distance, the reflection produced by the polished floor doubled and inverted the wedge shape, flattening out the ensemble until it seemed to float impossibly on a single vertical plane.⁶ (see Fig. 2)

To create an ambient space which is not dependent upon overt spectacle yet is capable of eliciting a palpable sensorial response in the viewer, is quite a feat. The reading of or encounter with Irwin's conditional art installations, could be subtle to the point of being quiet and nearly imperceptible. Other times, the works were revelatory and immense in their sensorial implications, initiating a powerful space-altering effect. Irwin was interested in pairing the art experience down in order to re-sensitize the embodied viewer to the minute intricacies of the phenomenal experience. Here, Susan Sontag makes a comment



Figure 2. *Untitled (Slant Light Volume)*, Robert Irwin, 1971.

in her essay *Against Interpretation* regarding our culture's influence on our sensory experience:

Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience (...) What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. Our task is to cut back the content so we can see the thing at all.⁷

Theorist Susan Buck-Morss points out the significant etymology and contextual lineage of the term aesthetics, as it relates to the idea of our phenomenal and corporeal experience of our environment: "Aisthikōs is the ancient Greek word for that which is "perceptive by feeling." Aisthesis is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality-corporeal, material nature."⁸ Buck-Morss goes on to expand on the connection between sensorial perception and aesthetics:

As Terry Eagleton writes: "Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body." It is a form of cognition, achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell—the whole corporeal sensorium. The terminae of all these—nose, eyes, ears, mouth, some of the most sensitive areas of skin—are located at the surface of the body, the mediating boundary between inner and outer.⁹

The primacy of perception in a body-centered viewing of art is essential to comprehending and, therefore, experiencing Irwin's conditional art. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a key figure in the field of phenomenology elucidates this relationship between bodily or sensory perception and abstract thought:

By these words, the "primacy of perception," we mean that the experience of perception is a nascent logos; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of

assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality.¹⁰

Art critic and writer Lawrence Weschler comments on the perceptual awareness which informs Irwin's understanding of artistic response: "The most fundamental assertion remained that of the primacy of perception. Irwin had become increasingly convinced that perception precedes conception, that every thought or idea arises within the context of an infinite field of perceptual presence which it thereupon rushes to delimit."¹¹

In 1979 Robert Irwin received a commission from the General Service Administration for site-conditioned work in the recently renovated Old Post Office Building in Washington D.C. The stakes were particularly high for this commissioned work, as this building housed the headquarters for the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the General Service Administration. When Irwin paid a visit to the site in the Fall of 1979, which is a historic ten-story building dating from the turn of the century, he in Simms' words: "immediately gravitated toward the vast atrium and, specifically, the grid pattern of window-like openings of the upper floors."¹² His original proposal was to use stainless steel cables to suspend an expansive grid pattern of 56 rectangle planes of scrim along the entire length of one side of the vast atrium. As the installation wasn't able to hang as low as Irwin had originally intended, it became a grid of 48 planes of stretched scrim suspended in space, each plane measuring eight by nine feet. The title of this landmark work which was completed in 1983 is *48 Shadow Planes*. The scrim planes were meant to be in dialogue with the architectural openings and also to pick up and respond to the variations of light and shadow in the glass-roofed atrium. As Irwin later described: "The grid of planes is not the object of focus...your eye does not hold on the grid, but moves back and forth, continually referencing the architecture and, in effect, attending [to] the whole phenomena."¹³ (see Fig. 3)

This site-conditioned work transforms what would otherwise be an empty volume of space by capturing shifting patterns of shadow and light as they incrementally shift throughout the day. In the early day for instance, depending on the cloud cover, a yellowish light pervades the glass roof of the atrium illuminating the scrim. In the latter part of the day, when the light of the sun is no longer above, purple toned shadows are cast from the trusses and arches of the roof, which are also picked up by the shadow planes. As a viewer faces the grid of planes from the opposing side of the atrium, they integrate optically with the



Figure 3. 48 Shadow Planes, Robert Irwin, 1983.

arcades creating a perspectival illusion of spatial distance between the viewer and the planes, and the planes and the architecture are suspended in front of. If you look at the grid of panels obliquely the perspectival recession indicates the vast volume of the atrium itself and the staggering scale of the work which measures 110 feet in height and 135 feet in length. When viewed from the side the work fades from sight and nearly disappears.

Another firsthand account of *48 Shadow Planes* is put forth by art critic Thomas McEvilley:

The size and placement of the panels answer, though not precisely, or mechanically, to the surrounding “windows” or openings into the ambulatories. From any of these windows the piece is seen to powerful effect, but despite the fact that it is always before one’s eyes, it is not the least aggressive; its presence in the huge space is soft and gentle to the point of self-effacement – until one begins to watch it closely.¹⁴

Robert Irwin teaches us through his work how to look not just at the object or the thing. Irwin’s work is part and parcel of its environs, and as viewer’s we are asked to take in the entire ensemble. With his conditional art the subtleties, nuances, and interplay of the environment and the work create an ever changing flux of perceptual phenomena. The viewer would be relinquishing the total experience of the work to focus full attention on the art object. The following artist to be presented, Bruce Nauman, is just as intensely concerned with direct experience of the viewer. However, Nauman’s work tends to be fraught with tensions which complicate the embodied experience of the viewer, he then amplifies the dissonance created by these complications.

Everything became a little jumpy...there was nothing else in the space. So, the idea was that it would be hard to know what to focus on and even if you did, it would be hard to focus.¹⁵

–Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman is an artist who, like Irwin, also utilizes light and space. Yet, these environments tend to be restrictive, and create a feeling of unease and confusion in the viewer. Nauman's spatial work, such as his iconic corridors and rooms, found their beginnings in his studio-based performance actions. The artist's use of fluorescent light also originated in performance actions while he was still a graduate student in the mid-1960s. The curator and art historian Constance M. Lewallen recounts Nauman's initiation into the realm of performance:

Nauman said the idea of live performance occurred to him during his first semester as a teaching assistant to painter Wayne Thiebaud while a graduate student at the University of California, Davis. Typically, the students would sit in a circle and draw a model posed in the center of the room. This didn't make sense to Nauman. He decided that rather than drawing someone else's body, he would use his own body as material.¹⁶

Nauman engaged in two live performances while a graduate student, *Wall Floor Positions and Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube*. In an interview in 1970 with Willoughby Sharp for the avant-garde art publication *Avalanche*, Nauman recalls these two early performances. Constance M. Lewallen gleans a portion of this interview regarding *Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube* and adds brief commentary: "I was using my body as one element and the light as another, treating them as an equivalent and just making shapes"—in an obvious reference to fluorescent tube sculptures by Dan Flavin, both claiming and subverting a minimalist paradigm."¹⁷

The first corridor Bruce Nauman built was originally a prop for performance. Lewallen relates the story of the prop's discovery and subse-

quently becoming a sculptural object:

When Whitney Museum of American Art curator Marcia Tucker visited Nauman in Southampton while she was planning the exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, she saw the structure used for *Walk with Contrapposto* and asked to borrow it. Nauman recalled, "I'd gotten very used to it and I liked it. But I had never displayed anything like that or showed it. Initially I never thought of it as an art object at all, it was a prop."¹⁸

This work ended up being rebuilt and titled *Performance Corridor* and presented in the 1969 Whitney Museum exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* as an interactive sculptural object. In a letter to Marcia Tucker and co-curator of the exhibition James Monte regarding *Performance Corridor*, Nauman makes a statement about the prop which was soon to be christened a sculpture:

The piece as I explained is less a sculpture than a prop for performance of a dance or a studio exercise which I video-taped. In the museum situation it serves to severely restrict and then re-enforce the available audio, visual, and kinesthetic response of anyone who walks in or around the walls.¹⁹

The placement of *Performance Corridor* in the exhibition at the Whitney Museum, with one end butted up against the wall, came across as a dare extended to the participant. Theorist and art historian Martha Buskirk, puts it this way: "In a construction originally conceived as a frame for a series of actions performed only for the video camera was transformed into a challenge posed to the viewers about how to respond to the ambiguous invitation."²⁰

Bruce Nauman, at the time, seemed to view the prop in its newly assumed role of sculptural object as an extension of its original function in video-taped performances. The role Nauman plays is transformed along with the object, while the viewer has been designated the role of performer rather than the artist. This role change, however, has

been fraught with some unease and concerns of the Nauman. Constance Lewallen addresses the concerns Bruce Nauman had around the idea of the participant as performer: “He has said repeatedly that he doesn’t want the participant to alter his work.” I don’t like the idea of free manipulation,” he said in a 1972 interview.”²¹ Regardless of the concerns, this moment provided Nauman with the knowledge that he could make an interactive environment which the participant was unable to alter, as Nauman explains here in an excerpt from the same 1972 interview with Lorraine Sciarra:

That piece is important because it gave me the idea that you could make a participation piece without the participant being able to alter your work.” He also observed that, “a lot of strange things happened to anyone who walked into it.”²²

Lewallen expresses the profundity which was inaugurated by this exhibition, and its impact on the Nauman’s art practice:

Exhibiting *Performance Corridor* as an independent work at the Whitney is what led Nauman to conceive dozens of corridors and related architectural installations throughout the 1970s and occasionally beyond. After the rudimentary *Performance Corridor*, he variously incorporated sound, sound-dampening material, and other acoustic phenomena, and he inserted cameras, monitors, mirrors, and lights to experiment with perception and behavior in controlled environments.²³ (see Fig. 4)

Performance Corridor, as Lewallen mentions, led to a proliferation of spatial encounters, both corridors and rooms, which were made by Bruce Nauman mostly in the seventies and into the eighties. Most of these are psychologically charged spaces which create a palpable sense of anxiety and disorientation for the viewer.

One room-sized installation stands out as an anomaly from the rest of Nauman’s rooms and corridors. The disorienting nature which defines many of his works is present, yet does not overpower the transforma-

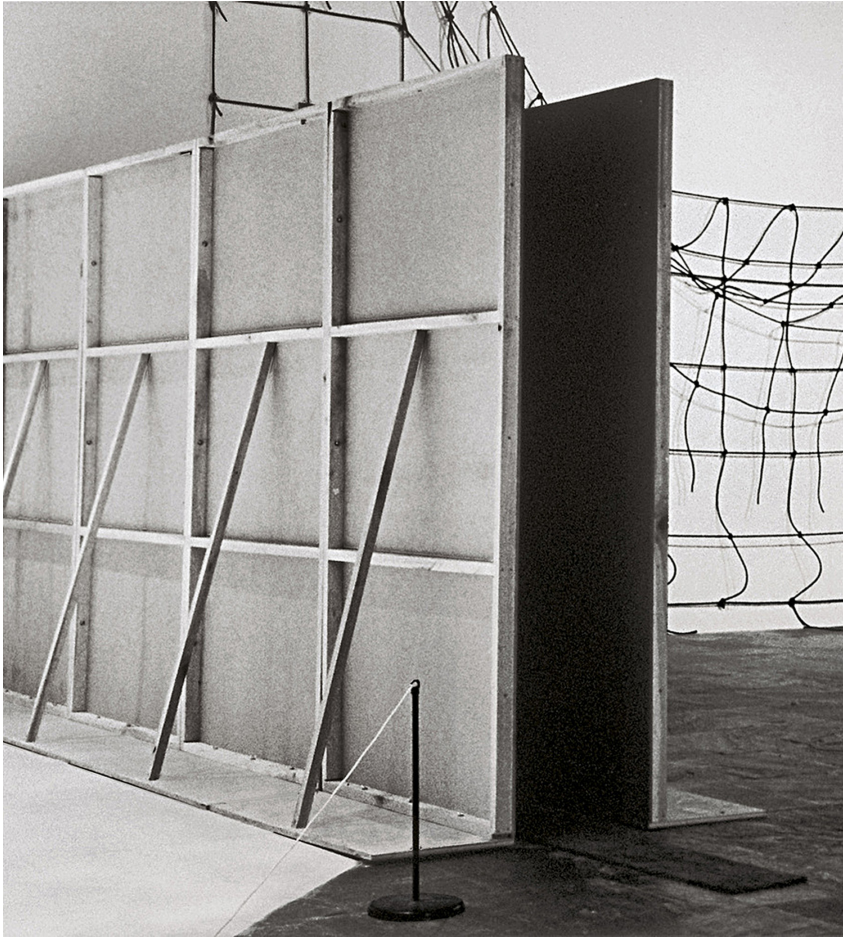


Figure 4. *Performance Corridor*, Bruce Nauman, 1969.

tive and blissful nature of the piece. This work is titled *Natural Light*, *Blue Light Room*. Nauman first installed it on site at Ace Gallery in Vancouver for the first two weeks of December in 1971. The artist had previously worked with light and space in a handful of pieces prior to this one, including his iconic *Green Light Corridor* (1970). This work, which has its own ambiguity, tends to lean toward a pervasive and unsettling effect upon senses, as Constance M. Lewallen notes here: “He could use fluorescent light to achieve a sense of disorientation like that created by video cameras and monitors. This long, twelve-inch-wide

corridor, one of the few open on both ends, requires most viewers to traverse it sideways.”²⁴ She then adds: “The intense green light of Nauman’s corridor is discomfiting. Nauman himself found the experience of the *Green Light Corridor* tense.”²⁵

When *Natural Light, Blue Light Room* was initially installed, Bruce Nauman had already begun to explore how to make body-centered spatial encounters that would produce a particular physiological or emotive experience for the viewer. Nauman’s relentless studio experimentation involving himself as the embodied experiencer of the work enabled him to develop a unique understanding of the effects of these spaces before they left the studio for exhibition. This particular piece, because of widely varied responses it is able to induce in the viewer, evades any expected effect—making it sensorially ambiguous and thus subjective in unforeseen ways. Constance M. Lewallen relates some of the motivations and impetus for this stand alone work:

The chromatic effects resulting from fluorescent light in combination with the incandescent gallery lights led Nauman to explore what happened when he paired fluorescent light with natural light in *Natural Light, Blue Light Room* (1971). This installation is perhaps the closest Nauman ever gets to the installations by Light and Space artists. A three-wall construction is suffused with blue fluorescent light radiating from the tops of the walls. A fourth wall is illuminated by natural white light from a skylight that takes on some of the blue of the fluorescent light toward the bottom.²⁶ (see Fig. 5)

Upon entering the room, viewers respond kinesthetically to the vacant space and unmatched light. After a few moments in the room, it becomes clear that due to the differing tonalities of light, the blue fluorescent light along the upper left corner of the space and the natural light along the lower right side as it seeps in from the underside of the floating wall—that their vision continually fails to focus due to the strange luminous confluence. This imbalance becomes increasingly

baffling as the quality of light in the room continually shifts incrementally, in cadence with the flux of the light from outside. All the while, the blue light vibrates in place, and begs the viewer's attention. There is a fogginess to the atmosphere of the space due to mixing of the bodies of light. However, if the viewer is able to remain unfocused on particulars of the space and can plumb the depths of the blurry bluish light, the room begins to feel submerged in sky or water. This meditative way of viewing the ensemble is achieved within this particular work of Bruce Nauman, *Natural Light, Blue Light Room*, unveils a radiant and spacious serenity. The phenomenal perceptions and sensorial distortions at play due to the incongruous light, places the viewers direct embodied experience at the center stage.



Figure 5. Natural Light, Blue Light Room, Bruce Nauman, 1971.

2. Transformative Space

This inhabiting of space by consciousness is the entry of self into space through the penetration of vision, which is not limited to that received by the eyes but also has to do with the entry of the self into that which is “seen.” A lot of spaces are interesting to me when they are generated not by the architecture of form but by the overlay of thought.²⁷

-James Turrell

The making and experiencing of art can be perception-altering and spiritual in nature. Some works are able to transport the viewer to another plane by presenting a situation where one is able to enter a dream state. The work of the artist James Turrell has this profound ability to isolate and intensify light in a way which allows a viewer to enter into another state of being—at times by literally confronting you with the cosmos. Roden Crater, acquired in 1977 by Turrell, is located in the Painted Desert region of Northern Arizona. The site is an unfathomable observatory for contemplative perception of natural and created light. Nested within a now dormant volcanic cinder cone, the crater houses a complex network of tunnels, chambers, apertures, and portals, for experiencing the majesty of light and the music of the spheres, as composed by the artist.

Turrell comments on the anomalous setting and the geologic and celestial sense of time one may experience at the site:

What will happen at Roden Crater is a good example of that. It is a volcanic crater located in an area of exposed geology, the Painted Desert, an area where you feel geologic time. You have a strong feeling of standing on the surface of the planet. Within that setting, I am making spaces that will engage celestial events. Several spaces will be sensitive to starlight and will be literally empowered by the light of stars millions of light years away. The gathered starlight will inhabit that space, and you will be able to feel the physical presence of the light.²⁸

A key element of the Roden Crater experience is the active rather than passive perception required of the participants who visit the site, as the work calls for a certain level of attunement to achieve the transformative sensorial experience which may be had there. The various contexts of light are directly or indirectly revealed to the viewer. A diffuse field of light (Ganzfeld), a combination of natural and created light, or an isolation of natural light, will all enable this mystifying connection with the light they encounter. (see Fig. 6)



Figure 6. Sun / Moon Chamber, James Turrell.

Turrell elaborates on the materiality of light and his intentions when using it:

Light is a powerful substance. We have a primal connection to it. But, for something so powerful, situations for its felt presence are fragile. I form it as much as the material allows. I like to work with it so that you feel it physically, so you feel the presence of light inhabiting a space. I like the quality of feeling that is felt not only with the eyes.²⁹

It is interesting that a word such as fragile is used in relation to the monuments at the vast scale of Roden Crater or even the Sky Spaces within the dormant cinder cone, which house these encounters with light. When discussing the context of light in spaces, we should also acknowledge that Roden Crater exists on Indigenous land.

The Roden Crater site is located within Hopi territory, and the geologic time and sacred presence of their Painted Desert is palpably felt when one is immersed in this landscape. Writer and Physicist Richard Bright comments on an aspect of Hopi beliefs regarding the cosmos:

For the Hopi, the human spirit is seen as an intrinsic part of nature and the universe, where both 'share the same breath'. A person's path through life is regarded as synonymous with the path of the Sun. The Sun rising in the east, the birth of the day, is associated with life while the sunset in the west is associated with death. The light of day and human life are associated with the 'upper world,' darkness and death are associated with the 'lower world'. For the Hopi, the universe is regarded as a series of worlds which lie on top of one another, and they believe that their ancestors have gradually emerged through each of them, to the 'light of life' in the upper world.³⁰

While James Turrell may not agree with shadow having as much meaning as light, he has, however, dedicated his life's work and magnum opus, this Roden Crater, to deepening the human connection to the

earth, the light, and the cosmos. His longtime research in the fields of visual and psychological perception, his spiritual nature as a Quaker, his experience as a seasoned pilot, combined with the sensibilities he has acquired working with light and space—has put James Turrell in a position to make this important work. Roden Crater shares a lineage of archeo-astronomical sites and naked-eye observatories which have been constructed throughout time, spiritually and scientifically motivated. James Bright comments: “In many ways Roden Crater may be seen in the tradition of many archeo-astronomical sites, such as El Karnak in Egypt or Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, but what Turrell brings to this ancient art is a contemporary sensibility.”³¹ (see Fig. 7)

James Turrell discusses his motivations for working with the presence of light in space:

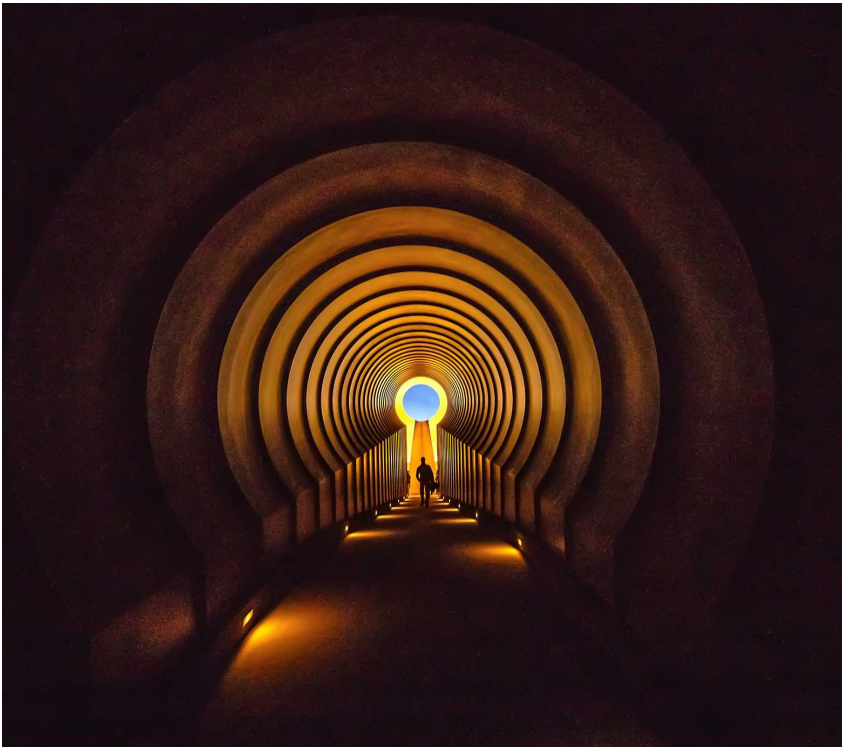


Figure 7. Alpha (East) Tunnel), James Turrell.

In working with light, what is really important to me is to create an experience of wordless thought, to make the quality and sensation of light itself something really quite tactile. It has a quality seemingly intangible, yet it is physically felt. Often people reach out to try to touch it. My works are about light in the sense that light is present and there; the work is made of light. It is not about light or a record of it, but it is light.³²

The comparisons of Turrell's work to religious, mystical, or ecstatic experiences—are not unfounded. Turrell himself speaks about creating an experience of “wordless thought” with his work, and somehow language which attempts to describe this very experience with words, often falls short. This sentiment by theorist Fredric Jameson regarding a reaction in the recesses of one's psyche to a confounding artwork seems a fitting response for someone perceiving a light-filled space at Roden Crater:

On the occasion of what first seems to be an encounter with a work of some kind, the categories of the mind itself—normally not conscious, and inaccessible to any direct representation or to any thematizable self-consciousness or reflexivity—are flexed, their structuring presence now felt laterally by the viewer like musculature or nerves of which normally remain insensible.³³

James Turrell himself now conveys the perceptual experience the viewer may be able to have in his work: “The power of the physical presence and tangibility of the light-filled space and its changing sense of existence tend to make it feel like the dream that coexists with the awake state.”³⁴ The immersive chambers within the crater facilitate an entirely new relationship between human beings and these dreamlike spaces. Roden Crater is a testament to this singular fascination with light as a medium, and its evocation and palpable presence.

From my site you can see mountains with lines on them where the old lake bit into the rock as it was going down. The mirages are extraordinary, you can see whole mountains hovering over the earth, reflected upside down in the heat. The feeling of timelessness is overwhelming.³⁵

-Nancy Holt

Nancy Holt began work on her *Sun Tunnels* in 1973 and completed the work in 1976, this work established her presence within the scope of the heavily lauded, and at the same time controversial, first generation of the Land artists. Here curator and art writer Lucy R. Lippard sheds some light on the work leading up to this project and on the *Sun Tunnels* themselves:

In the early '70s, Nancy Holt concentrated on urban or landscape spaces as seen through holes in tunnels, pipes, and other devices that made the viewer consider both outside and inside, perceptual and physiological sensations. In *Sun Tunnels* (1973-76), an ambitious work constructed in Utah's Great Basin Desert, Holt again bound sky and earth and again tapped a lyrical vein within steadfastly "objective" forms. *Sun Tunnels* consist of four huge concrete pipes (18' and 9' 2 ½" in diameter, with walls 7 ¼" thick). They face each other in pairs across a central void and are oriented to the summer and winter solstices.³⁶

While these reinforced concrete tunnels are quite massive and extremely heavy, they are scant in comparison to the mountains in the distance. Lippard comments on the inconspicuous tonality of the cylinders and their relationship in sculptural form to the body:

Though the great cylinders are the same grey color and material as the earth of the site, they offer only abstracted points of identification with the human body. The round holes in the walls,

however, offer micro/macrocosmic parallels between the human eye (looking in, looking out), the form of the earth itself, the form of the planets they bring down to the earth, and the motion of the sun and planets.

There is another aspect of the *Sun Tunnels* in relation to the body and that is scale. They are built to the scale of a human shelter and create a microcosm of enclosures for bodily navigation and interaction. The viewer is exposed when navigating between the cylinders and protected when inside. (see Fig. 8)



Figure 8. *Sun Tunnels*, Nancy Holt, 1973-1976.

The way that the *Sun Tunnels* are able to frame the viewer's perspective of the vast desert landscape does come through somewhat in the photographic images, yet one might argue that it is helpful to put these sightlines into words as an exercise in looking. The arrangement of these "great cylinders" roughly forms an open "X" which creates an empty space in the center. In the first sightline, if a viewer is standing in this center space, they would have the opportunity to rotate their horizontal line of vision and look between the tunnels or to directly through the barrel of a tunnel. In the second sightline the viewer is standing on the outside of the *Sun Tunnels* peering through an aligned pair of tunnels.

First sightline: In the daylight, from the center space of the Sun Tunnels and sighting through one of them, your vision is framed by the cylindrical barrel of the tunnel which is comparable to peering through the barrel of a telescope. A horizon line divides the circularly framed landscape which runs along the base of the low mountains in the distance. A slightly irregular semicircle of land lies below this horizon, and the slightly irregular semicircle above is all sky. A constellation of light let in by the holes perforates the cylinders surrounds this concrete framed landscape. The variously sized light shapes are elliptic and separated by shadow. The outside of the great cylinder is framed by sky and land.

Second sightline: you peer through an aligned pair of tunnels which are in a diminishing perspective. The tunnel closest to you has the previously described first sightline at the center of the circularly framed landscape like the center of a bullseye. An arc of sky and an arc of land surround this, which is also framed by the interior of a concrete cylinder in diminishing perspective. The land and sky also frame this great cylinder.

Sun Tunnels is not only in union with its vast desert landscape, but this work also amplifies and heightens the inherent power of the site. It is

a noteworthy aspect of the work that this effect is doubled by peering through an aligned pair of tunnels. Here, Nancy Holt expands on further intricacies of perceptual phenomena produced by the piece:

From the center of the work, the tunnels extend the viewer visually into the landscape, opening up the perceived space. But once inside the tunnels, the work encloses—surrounds—there is a framing of the landscape through the ends of the tunnels and through the holes...When the sun beats down on the site, the heat waves seem to make the earth dissolve, and the tunnels appear to lose their substance—they float like mirages in the distance. Around the time of the solstices, when the sun rises and sets through the tunnels, it glows bright orange on the tunnel walls.³⁷

In addition to framing the viewer's perception of the landscape, the work also acts as a shelter from the elements and provides the immersive experience of navigating in between, around, and into the interiors of the tunnels which is a wondrous experience in itself. Here, the artist describes the interior of the tunnels and the stellar constellations within them:

The configuration of holes in the upper half of each tunnel corresponds with a constellation, either Capricorn, Columba, Draco, or Perseus. The four diameters of the holes vary from 7 to 10 in. relative to the magnitude of the stars to which they correspond. During the day, the sun, a star among stars, casts a changing pattern of pointed ellipses and circles of light on the bottom half of each tunnel.³⁸

Holt goes on: "The spots of warm light in the cool, shady tunnels are like stars cast down to earth, inverting the sky, turning day into night. And on many desert nights moonlight shines through the holes, casting its own paler pattern."³⁹ This description poetically captures the feeling of coolness within the refuge of the tunnel, and the transformative

sensorial experience the viewer may have amongst the patterns of dappled light which have fallen onto the floor of the tunnel's interior. The viewer may feel an intimacy with the light (moonlight and starlight in the evening), as well as an intimacy of space in contrast to the spaciousness of the landscape. In this work, Holt has found a way through her art to marry the heavens with the earth and pay homage to the natural beauty of the site itself. In Lucy R. Lippard's words:

"The desert is the traditional geography of revelation—simultaneously empty and full." ⁴⁰(see Fig. 9)



Figure 9. *Sun Tunnels*, Nancy Holt, 1973-1976.

The majority of the population of western culture has an estranged metaphysical relationship with nature and the cosmos, which some would argue, leaves an unfulfilled gap in the livelihood of the members of their respective culture. However, there are beliefs and spiritual faiths alive today which acknowledge and celebrate these ancient connections. For example, in the Shambhala tradition, an ancient allegory known as “The Great Eastern Sun,” celebrates the vital substance of the sun. Tibetan Buddhist meditation master and scholar Chögyam Trungpa comments on creative acts which acknowledge such beliefs: “[this work] applies to involving ourselves with visual dharma, or dharma art.”⁴¹ Trungpa then explains some of the significance of the sun in the mythic allegory of *The Great Eastern Sun*:

Sun has a sense of all-pervasive brilliance, which does not discriminate in the slightest. It is the goodness that exists in a situation, in oneself and in one’s world, which is expressed without doubt, hesitation or regret. The Sun represents the idea of no laziness, and the Sun principle also includes the notion of blessings descending upon us and creating a sacred world. The Sun also represents clarity, without doubt.⁴²

Nancy Holt has made a work which has the ability to make communion between the viewer and the immense power of this site. Two major factors in creating this transformative power of the site are indeed the pristine skies far from the light pollution of the cities allowing for unfathomable perception of celestial events above the mountain rimmed valley. One could then say that the skies are set in ‘celestial time’. The salt desert and its fossils and exposed geology also carries with it an undeniable presence, which one could say they feel ‘geologic time’. In Nancy Holt’s words:

“Time” is not just a mental concept or a mathematical abstraction in the desert. The rocks in the distance are ageless; they have been deposited in layers over hundreds of thousands of years. “Time” takes on a physical presence. Only 10 miles south

of Sun Tunnels are the Bonneville Salt Flats, one of the few areas of the world where you can actually see the curvature of the earth.⁴³

Nancy Holt comments on the site-specific origin of *Sun Tunnels*: "The idea for the work came to me while I was in the desert watching the sun rising and setting, keeping the time of the earth. *Sun Tunnels* can exist only in that particular place—the work evolved out of its site."

⁴⁴ The context of site-specificity was still a fairly recent method of working when this work was created. In the words of art historian and curator Miwon Kwon: "The uncontaminated and pure idealist space of dominant modernisms was radically displaced by the materiality of the natural landscape or the impure and ordinary space of the everyday."

⁴⁵ Kwon continues: "Site-specific work in its earliest formation, then, focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and the site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion." ⁴⁶ There are many reasons for opting for a site-specific way of working, and for that matter, for making work outside of the "white cube," and in a natural landscape such as the desert. Nancy Holt's husband, Robert Smithson, who passed away in 1973, the year Holt began constructing Sun Tunnels was an artist, art writer, and forerunner of the Earth/Land Art movement; Smithson comments: "The investigation of a specific site is a matter of extracting concepts out of existing sense-data through direct perceptions... One does not impose, but rather exposes the site...the unknown areas of sites can best be explored by artists." ⁴⁷ In the earliest examples of site-specificity in art, a sense of immutability and permanence was conveyed by the work even if the materials used to realize the work were ephemeral in nature. *Sun Tunnels*, following this rationale of permanence, is built to last for years to come, even in its harsh desert environment.

Site-specific research and methodologies needed to be conducted to make this work, which connected Sun Tunnels to the site in many other

ways which exceed connections to the site based on sheer durability. Holt explains her process of figuring out the astronomical details of her project:

In Utah I made drawings and worked with scale models and hoops in the desert, trying out different lengths, diameters, and placements, and doing photographic studies of the changes in light and shadow. I consulted with an astrophysicist at the University of Utah about the angles of the solstices at the latitude of my land.⁴⁸

Impressively, many of these site-based experiments and observations were done in an analog fashion using instruments such as the helioscope. Some of the calculations made for the height of the mountains, and compensation for contours and anomalies of the land were done with the aid of early computer technology. This data was used to adjust the solstice angles, and to arrive at the open “X” formation of the tunnels. Holt also determined The size and dimensions of the tunnels by site-specific research: “I chose the diameter, length, and distance of the tunnels based on proportions of what could be seen of the sky and land, and how long the sun could be seen rising and setting on the solstices.”⁴⁹

Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* are positioned so that on winter and summer solstices, when the sun is on the horizon, they are framed by an aligned pair of tunnels. Holt comments on this: “By marking the yearly extreme positions of the sun, *Sun Tunnels* indicate the “cyclical time” of the solar year. The center of the work becomes the center of the world.” The *Sun Tunnels* are far from discrete objects unto themselves, they channel the transformative energy of this place (the cosmos and landscape), so that it may be received and felt by the participant.

3. Emotive Space

TOPOPHOBIA implies fear of place—or rather fear of a place, of being *in situ*. Associated with stage fright, topophobia refers to one's environment and situation. It concerns our subjective experience of being in space according to the conditions of a location, of the physical room that senses apprehend and in which the body moves, a space that, following Michel de Certeau, acquires its specificity through movement and actions, and is enlivened by emotion.⁵¹

—Caterina Albano

In January of 1978, the artist Gordon Matta-Clark and a small team engaged in cutting into the interior of a townhouse, which was due to be demolished as part of the expansion of the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art. This work by Matta-Clark has the full title of *Circus or the Caribbean Orange*, 1978; yet for the sake of simplicity, it will henceforth be referred to as *Circus*. Art historian Pamela M. Lee comments: “It was Matta-Clark’s only site project made specifically for a museum, made possible by an invitation of the curator Judith Russi Kirschner.”⁵² Lee goes on: “*Circus* was staged in a three-story brownstone on East Ontario Street, whose cramped architecture ‘imposed a strict sense of limitations on the form’ and dimensions of the artist’s gesture.”⁵³ This work utilized mainly the interior of the structure and rooftop of the building due to the regulations imposed by the architectural firm overseeing this expansion of the MCA. Two of the main restrictions were that the cuttings couldn’t exceed twenty feet in width, and the facade could not be cut into at all.

This was a windfall of an opportunity for Matta-Clark to have access to a space adjacent to the museum and to be granted permission for the museum going public to enter the cut-space and engage physically with the work. The exhibition presented an unprecedented occasion for viewers outside of those who are artworld affiliated, or of Matta-Clark's peer group, to experience a cut building on site. The typical way anyone experienced his work was through artifacts of a project on display as sculpture, or through some other documentation of the cutting. Visitors to the MCA would have access to *Circus* from January 28 until February 13th, 1978. Pamela Lee remarks on the precarity of what was considered a safe viewing of the cut space:

The artist noted that the project "was conceived for a safe visit by the public along the principal stairs and hallways up to the third floor," although Lawrence Weiner actually fell—fortunately unharmed—through a cut. In spite of these logistical concerns, the general conditions for making the work were largely the same as any other of his cuttings. The building is another one of those "throw-aways," Matta-Clark observed, 'a throw-away environment.'⁵⁴

Circus was unexpected and startling to the senses because of decisions which were made in counterpoint to these existing architectural limitations and the imposed structural restrictions. During the interview with curator Judith Russi Kirshner at the MCA, Matta-Clark mentioned that responding to the building's restrictions directed many of his decisions: "the form or shape of the building and its particular size, dictated to me the first decisions I made."⁵⁵ Matta-Clark also mentions the façade: "let's say the masonry was not so sacred...I would have done something visible from the outside."⁵⁶ He adds: "The biggest restriction that was put on the project as far as I can tell was the fact that I couldn't open it up—I couldn't make anything larger than a 20-foot opening."⁵⁷ When evaluating this work one should acknowledge the unforgiving dimensions of the building itself as well as the restrictions

placed on Matta-Clark by the architectural firm, and how this dynamic work was made in spite of these hindrances. The brownstone had what was described as “cramped architecture,” the building was narrow, long, and just three-stories high. Matta-Clark devised his sizable circular cuts so that they would gradually move toward the back of the building as they climbed in elevation, lending the sense of movement to the undoing. The structural restriction for not making cuts wider than twenty feet was cleverly avoided by leaving all the joists and framing for the floors intact, while removing all other unwanted material. The last restriction was that the brownstone façade is not cut into whatsoever; Matta-Clark skirted this limitation by having the removals devour large swaths of the interior before exiting at the roof, thus leaving the façade unscathed. The appearance of an unaltered building precipitated a sense of shock when the visitor entered into an unexplainably decimated space. Pamela M. Lee comments on the reactions the viewers would undergo when crossing the threshold between exterior and interior of *Circus*:

But it is ultimately the cuts themselves that animate a broader notion of a dynamical sensibility. Described as one of the most terrifying elements of the work (aside from the building’s scale), they engender the strange contradiction of the work’s translucency on one hand (the result of being able to look through the inner structure of the building) and the utter illegibility of the building on the other.⁵⁸

Upon entering, one encounters large circular arcs cut into the ceiling, as well the ceilings of the floors above. The circular floor “islands” still embrace the now bare framing boards in a sea of otherwise negative space. The second floor has a partitioned ovoid chamber, which Matta Clark formed by cutting vertical arcs into the sides of the rectilinear walls. This oblong-spherical form, which terminates in abrupt flatness at the top and base, seems to allude to the alternate title Matta-Clark used for this work; the “Caribbean Orange” portion of the

title references latitudinally sliced oranges. The action of the negative space increases as the strata of cuts and negative space surrounding the remaining discs of floor traverses the building's elevation in an ascending diagonal axis. The cuts finally surface toward the back of the three-story townhouse where they meet the Chicago skyline. This dynamic gesture bears resemblance to the trajectory of a thrown ball. The spectators could follow this dynamic gesture as it traveled up through all the levels creating a leaning tower composed of levitating platforms which ascend through the structure. The islands of floor required the spectators to circumnavigate the area, to feel the voids and sense the remaining shaped architecture of each level. Pamela Lee states: "*Circus*, to follow Matta-Clark's puns and odd allocations, was not only a place where people looked through and at things, or a place where people were themselves viewed. It staged no less than the circulation of its audience in one of Matta-Clark's most ambulatory spaces."⁵⁹ Framing *Circus* in terms of philosopher Immanuel Kant's theory of "dynamical sublime," Lee states:

Consider now the second formulation of the sublime—the "dynamical"—through kinesis or temporality of the work, and, finally, the cut or the edge. "I think of time as well as scale," Matta-Clark once offered with regard to a building cut, a remark that appeals strongly to the dynamical sublime. Kant notes that, "the feeling of the sublime brings with it as its characteristic feature a *movement* of the mind bound up with judging the object. "That movement he observes, is connected explicitly with its might or force, "that which is superior to great hindrances, "or that which "must be represented as exciting fear."⁶⁰

The dynamical sublime threatens, but by no means destroys, skirting the line between actual and imagined danger to the viewer. In *Circus* there exists a bewildering relationship in this work between presence and absence. Yet, more importantly, the work creates a fraught relationship between absences (in the form of cut space) and other voids.

Part of what makes this particular work such an emotive and psychologically charged environment is this spatial paradox, where the negative space plays multiple roles. It shapes and defines forms, yet it also obliterates form, and may itself be obliterated by other absences. The illegibility created by this paradoxical relationship generates a spatial obfuscation that parallels optical unreadability in nature. The effect of this perceptual confusion could bring about a number of responses in the viewer such as anxiety, overexcitement, and vertigo. Pamela Lee adds: “The result is that the cuts that define the centrality of that space—which gives it its peculiar form—are the very elements that threaten to swallow it up.”⁶¹ She goes on to say: “One paradox unleashed by the placement of the cuts is that negative space appears to collide with negative space.”⁶² (see Fig. 10)



Figure 10. *Circus or The Caribbean Orange*, Gordon Matta-Clark, 1978.

This spatial paradox is further amplified by the presence of other moving bodies within the work. While the viewer traverses the space, other figures appear suddenly through the voids left by the cuts in startling and confounding ways, visual planes diverge, and then converge into distortion. Pamela Lee describes this effect:

Likewise, the clarity or legibility of the spatial relationship is refused, the result of an apparent surfeit of movement and people within the space. And insofar as the people within the building provide an excess of figuration, so, too, might the claim be universalized for the work as a whole. It is not simply the presence of the viewers that endows *Circus* with the quality of figure-figure but the proliferation of all the figuring elements, which the gesture of the cut unleashes.⁶³

This experience, in conjunction with the viewer's altered proprioception from being in a completely destabilized environment, could bring about vertigo and spatial dislocation which could prove to be overwhelming. Matta-Clark in his cutting interventions sought to release movement from the static architecture--in a sense he was seeking to free the space from their confined state. In an interview with Kirshner, the artist comments about his preoccupation with dynamism in his work: "The thing I would really like to express by that way of working is the idea of transforming this static, enclosed condition of architecture."⁶⁴ He goes on: "the reason for the void is so that the ingredients can be seen in a moving way--in a dynamic way. You have to see them by moving through them. They imply a kind of kinetic, internal dynamism of some sort." Along with this frenetic space, one is confronted with temporality which is intrinsic to the dynamical shift to which the environment has undergone. Matta-Clark, as the artist who performed the cuts which provoked this dynamic release, was most likely the best equipped to 'read' the space or the negative spaces. In this drastically transformed environment, which one might liken to the artist "reading" the voids he has created to reading his own handwriting.

Philosopher Michel de Certeau's emphasizes the fact that spaces are activated, realized, and contextualized by the interactions staged within and around them:

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus, space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual and contractual proximities.⁶⁶

As stated earlier, the spectator lacked access to many of Gordon Matta-Clark's important site-based works. Many years after his passing, inspiration can still be found in the visionary strides he initiated in his work, which are imbued in the artifacts, documentation, and writing about this remarkable artist who died so young. However, it is troubling that many of his projects, such as the building cuts, other site-specific works, performances, and social practice works, demanded an embodied viewing or physical presence to experience the full purport of the piece. Due to the contingent factors of the building cuts for example, only very few people were ever really able to experience them firsthand. Luckily, photographic montages and images remain, as well as film and video footage conveying the experience of being within the spaces. Even though this project differed from the others by being integrated into the programming of the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, the building was still, much like the artist Matta-Clark, short for this world. Circus was indeed the last major project Matta-Clark completed before dying in August the very same year at the age of 35, from pancreatic cancer. Circus was demolished roughly a year after its completion, just a few months after the artist's passing.

This brings us to a brief mention of Matta-Clark's color Cibachrome prints, most importantly as in conjunction with Matta-Clark's Circus. Art historian Briony Fer's states: "Matta-Clark called his Chi-

cago project a 'circus' because it offered 'a kind of circular stage to look at and circulate through and a 'circle' through which to operate.' But what of the miniature circus operative on that light table?"⁶⁷ Fer continues, "Matta-Clark's own view, expressed in a letter to Judith Russi Kirschner, the curator of the Chicago cut, that 'these large prints convey a new color vocabulary I have developed and will continue as part of my real work.'"⁶⁸ Matta Clark made these Cibachrome prints by cutting 35 mm. slide film into shapes. Often the film was irregularly cut showing portions of the sprockets. Matta-Clark then arranged these cut pieces into collages on a light table using colored masking tape and scotch tape to hold together the composition. He then enlarged and printed these collages of positive film stock on silver dye-embedded Cibachrome paper, which produced a lush celluloid-like print. This technique offered the artist "new vocabulary" of color, as well as the ability to print at an impressive scale for the time they were made. These silver bleach dye prints somehow approach an embodied spatial experience in a way that pushes the perceptual boundaries of the medium. Briony Fer describes the materiality and impact of the color Cibachromes: "the mixture of rawness and intricacy in the material world which this body of photographic work contains—arguably a world no less material (or any more inward looking) than a building cut through."⁶⁹ (Fig. 11)

Indeed, Matta-Clark was touching upon a well-worn path of collage, stretching back to Dada artists such as Hannah Hoch and Kurt Schwitters. Yet, by composing these innovative collages of photographic images of his own building cuts, and printing at an ambitious scale onto the luscious Cibachrome paper, the work became transformative. In regard to this lineage of collage, Briony Fer states, "To repeat the process on celluloid was far from a purely aesthetic gesture. The productive if uneasy relationship between collage and Cibachrome that Matta-Clark would mine came out of his long-standing preoccupation with the process of collage."⁷⁰ These unique Cibachrome prints transform the collage aesthetic almost alchemically. The seams and junctures are still visible, yet fused together into this

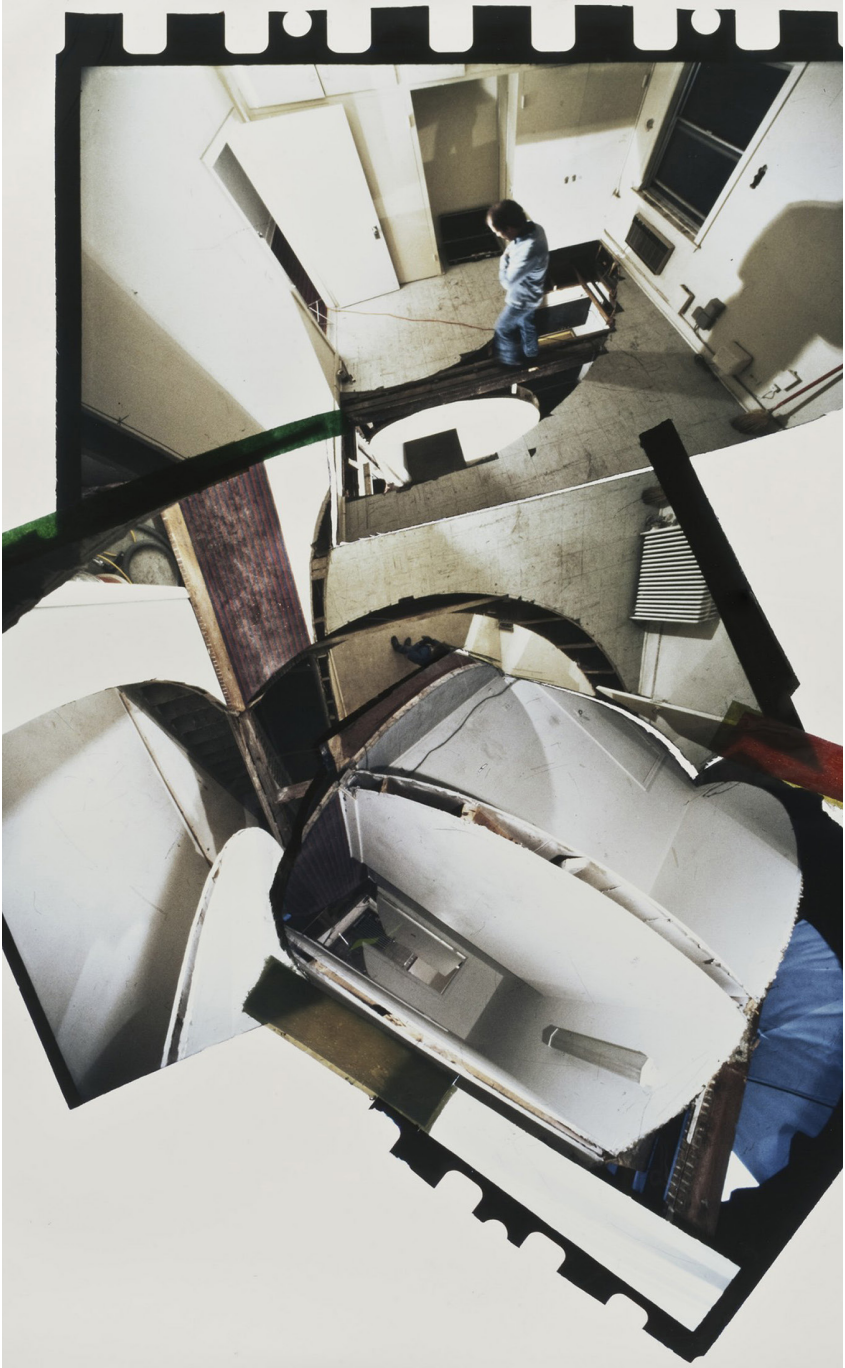


Figure 11. *Circus-The Caribbean Orange* (Cibachrome print), Gordon Matta-Clark, 1978.

vibrant and rich celluloid medium. The reconfiguration of the already complicated geometries made by the initial building cuts find a way to imagine the impossible. These works were a way to make new work, and to simultaneously reinterpret, revisit, and reinvent the site projects. These Cibachrome prints were a way for Matta-Clark to reimagine these spatial interventions in a manner which today is being replicated with technology such as 3-D scans and 360 degree cameras. Matta-Clark was capturing aspects of his cut spaces through the analogue means which have proved to be a proto-3-D scan process. This is yet another visionary contribution the artist had made in his brief and prolific career.

Rooms are never really empty. I think we subconsciously put our emotions in them.⁷¹

—Bruce Nauman

As we continue to look at emotive and psychologically charged spaces, it is only fitting that Bruce Nauman resurfaces in this discussion. Nauman's corridors and rooms, which emerged from his performance actions, are for the most part, confining, limiting, and disorienting. Yet they also convey, quite palpably, a sense of the artist who made the work you are experiencing—they are unmistakably the work of Bruce Nauman. These spaces relate to the human condition and create subjective experiences which bring about a heightened awareness of the viewer's own emotions and physicality.

Nauman's corridors and rooms are part of a lineage in art which stretches back to Allan Kaprow's "Environments" and even further back to Kurt Schwitters' sculptural spaces he referred to as Merzbau. During this era, the movements of Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Conceptualism helped usher in a new spatial vocabulary, which had

an influence on much of the installation work which would follow. Art historian Julie H. Reiss comments on the shifting terminology around what we commonly refer to as installation art:

Before the term 'Installation art' became part of the vernacular of contemporary art, there was the term 'Environment,' which was used by Allan Kaprow in 1958 to describe his room-sized multimedia works. This term was picked up by critics and used to describe a range of works for two decades.⁷²

Michael Fried in his polemical 1967 essay, titled *Art and Objecthood*, he unwittingly empowered an emerging aspect of spectatorship. This was the contingency of personal experience while viewing an artwork. The essay fervently denounces the 'theatricality' of Minimalism, which he found to be a strategy of pandering to the audience. Constance Lewallen points out the insightfulness of the initial observation of Fried, even though it proved to completely backfire on the critic: "Michael Fried perceptively identified the new relationship that minimal sculpture establishes with the viewer, demanding his or her attention in a way that unfolds over time and in real space (which for Fried represented theatricality)."⁷³ This essay in many ways was the swan song of the faltering ethics and mythologies that once supported the modernist aesthetic and sensibility typified by formalist critics such as Clement Greenberg. Art critic Michael Archer expands on the purport of Fried's admonishment of theatre in relation to the object of art, as it played out in the years which followed:

Experiencing Minimal art was, for Fried, an instance of "theatre": meaning unfolded as a consequence of the spectator's awareness of his or her relationship, psychological, physical, and imaginative, to the object. From this point on, the inherent relativity of the viewing experience itself became one of the most crucial factors for the artist to explore.⁷⁴

Artist and writer Peter Plagens remarks on Nauman's intention for his

corridors in relation to Michael Fried's condemnation of the theatricality of viewership:

Nauman's corridors both agree and disagree with Fried's comments about Minimalist sculpture. They agree in the sense that they effectively demonstrate the implied sense of human presence and theatricality in Minimalist sculpture. But they also answer Fried's criticism of Minimalism by making its alleged 'theatrical' shortcomings a major feature of the work.⁷⁵

By the time the Fried essay had been published, Bruce Nauman had not yet built his first corridor (featured in *Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968). However, prior to Nauman's seminal corridor, the artist Robert Morris created an important corridor work, titled *Passageway* (1961). This installation was created on site, in the entranceway of Yoko Ono's loft, as part of the Chambers Street Loft Series of performances and exhibitions, organized by Ono and the composer and artist La Monte Young. This viewer-activated work by Morris relates to the many variations of psychological spaces which Nauman would come to produce. Curator Paul Schimmel describes the spatiality and intention of this early corridor:

Morris constructed a reductive environment with a choreographer's brutal simplicity. The plywood-lined corridor, which extended fifty feet, narrowed gradually to a point. The participant was completely controlled by this three-dimensional sculptural environment.⁷⁶

Constance Lewellan comments on a corridor work which was also made during this time by the visionary artist Lucio Fontana:

Starting in 1949, Lucio Fontana in Italy experimented in *Ambienti spaziali*, or "spatial environments," which were almost always destroyed after being exhibited. One environment in particular, *Spatial Environment with Red Light* (1967), is relevant to this discussion.⁷⁷

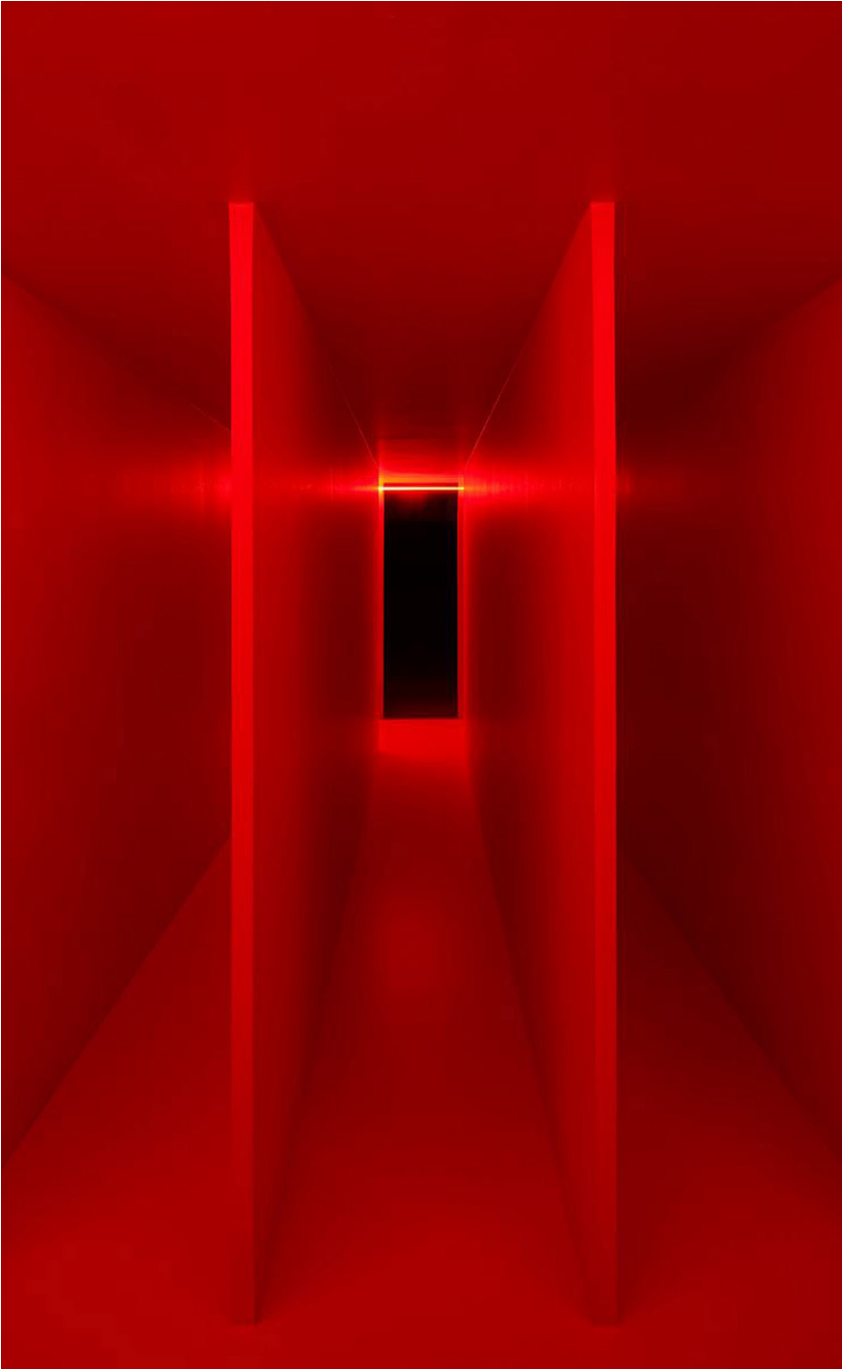


Figure 12, Ambiente spaziale a luce rossa, Lucio Fontana, 1967.

This work by Fontana consists of a series of narrow corridors which are submerged in an ambient chromatic bath. The neon light at the end of the corridors radiates an ethereal glow in the lipstick-red space. This work by Fontana is psychologically and sensorially ambiguous, conveying an unnerving, and at the same, time dream-like experience. For some this work could be meditative and calming, and for some it may induce panic and unease. (see Fig. 12)

Lucio Fontana's spatial environment is strikingly similar to Bruce Nauman's *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*. However, Bruce Nauman's work abruptly diverges from Fontana's in its encyclopedic complexity. Curator and art historian Ted Mann summarizes the essentials of this early corridor work by Nauman:

A group of six contiguous dead-end corridors of differing widths—some permitting entry, others impassable—which the artist outfitted with television monitors and linked video cameras. As a visitor navigated the space, closed-circuit video on the monitors permitted surveillance of an inaccessible nearby room or played footage of the visitor's own body in unexpected, and potentially unsettling ways.⁷⁸

In *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*, two stacked monitors sit on the floor at the end of the long narrow corridor on the far right. The top monitor displays a live feed of the spectator walking away down the corridor. Yet, as the viewer approaches the monitor, it reveals them getting further away until their image disappears altogether. The lower monitor displays previously recorded footage of the same corridor void of any occupancy. Lewallen comments on the atypical nature of Nauman's use of light in his installation:

According to Merleau-Ponty, lighting can direct our attention, connect our gaze, direct us to where we are going in an unfamiliar environment, but Nauman subverts this. The proverbial light at the end of the tunnel doesn't help the participant find his or

her way. Instead Nauman's corridors cause the participant to question his or her own place in the work.⁷⁹ (see Fig. 13)

The exhaustive and iterative corridor typologies at play in this work bring it nearly to the brink of distortion, yet it somehow fits together in a methodically linked system. The presence of surveillance equipment in the space is in and of itself unsettling, and the artist has taken it a step further by casting the participant in the dual role of self-interrogator and spectator. Eugen Blume states: "Nauman relentlessly



Figure 13. *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*, Bruce Nauman, 1970.

exposes us. In essence he builds 'experience traps.'"⁸⁰ Blume goes on: "What takes place within these 'traps' can be viewed as a model of psychological experience."⁸¹ In many of Bruce Nauman's works he presents conflicting information which creates a cognitive dissonance in the viewer's experience. In real space and time, while attempting to sort out the disparity in the information, further disorientation ensues. Peter Plagens playfully comments on this work: "With the Nick Wilder exhibition, he became increasingly interested in control. Put in extreme terms, he is the lab scientist and we're the rats. Nauman's nicer than that, though. We volunteer to go into the gallery or museum, we volunteer to enter those corridors."⁸²

In the *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*, Nauman incorporated closed circuit cameras on site linked to monitors while previously recorded video played from other monitors in the space. This simultaneity produced the disjunctive combination of sensory information the artist was after. The emotive and psychological response this work elicits in the viewer is immense. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, there is a sense of humanity, of our shared condition, which is knowable through Nauman's work. If the viewer is able to unpack the complex absurdity and satirical humor of the artist, they may find that there is latent empathy underlying many of these allegorical works.

Having just discussed one of Bruce Nauman's most complicated corridor installations, we can now examine a work which is just as psychologically charged, without the complex network of cameras and monitors. *Double Steel Cage Piece*, 1974, is a hybrid structure, both a cage and a corridor. There are multiple iterations of this work, and the specifications of this work are variable, as its dimensionality is in relation to the site. However, most of the versions of this work are close to 7 ft. x 13 ft. x 17 ft. Peter Plagens describes the basic materials and layout of Bruce Nauman's *Double Steel Cage Piece*:

Cage Piece is an interior cage constructed of steel beams and heavy-duty metal screening that is quite close to chain-link fencing, and a door to each cage is made out of the same materials. You can enter the outer cage, the door of which is usually left open in exhibition circumstances, but not the locked inner one. Between the two cages is barely enough room for a person to stand.⁸³

While within the work, the viewer may find comfort between two sturdy cages which are the equivalent of shark cages. However, this feeling may very well dissipate, as claustrophobia sets in, and the discomfort of being forced to orientate sideways curtails your ability to move about or face the other way. Constance Lewallen describes the palpable sense of confinement in this work:

It is experienced by moving crab-like, facing in or out, through the tight space between the two square nested cages, echoing two of Nauman's filmed performances of 1967-68 in which he walks around the perimeter of a square taped to his studio floor. The participant can only circumnavigate the narrow corridor; it is

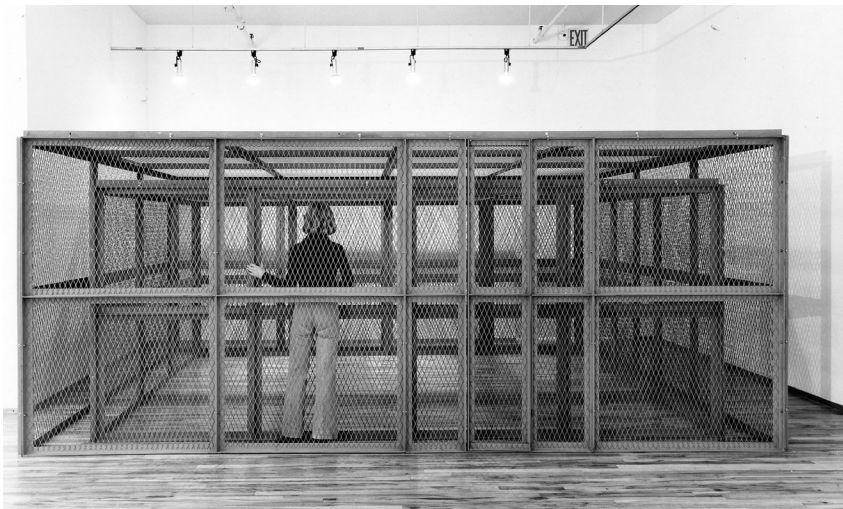


Figure 14. *Double Steel Cage*, Bruce Nauman, 1974.

not possible to enter the inner chamber. In essence, one is both trapped and exposed.⁸⁴ (see Fig. 14)

As many scholars and critics aid in pointing out, Bruce Nauman's performance actions or "dances" as he has referred to them, have a direct relationship to his sculptural and spatial work. Art historian Eugen Blume states: "Based on a range of performative acts, Bruce Nauman developed a sculptural idea which brought with it a new possibility for art, namely the activation of mental and physical self-experience in a manner precisely prescribed by the artist."⁸⁵ Constance Lewallen has brought up two of Nauman's filmed performances of 1967-68, which are: *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, 1968 and *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)*, 1967-68. Both of these performances were done by Nauman alone in his studio and highlight continuous and repetitive movements, which take place along the perimeter of the masking-taped square on his studio floor. These two works were part of a suite of four studio films from 1967-68, the other two were: *Bouncing Two Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*, 1967-68, and *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio*, 1967-68.

A notable aspect of this body of work is that these films also capture the ambient space and sound of the studio. In apparent isolation, the artist focuses intently on his repetitive actions, taking no notice of the camera. A vast, bare walled, sparsely furnished studio provides a backdrop for his performance activities. The studio is understated yet gains prominence within the duration of the work. Archeologist and art historian Janet Kraynak remarks: "In three of the films, for example, Nauman's body completely disappears from the film's frame, leaving the viewer to stare at a still picture of a seemingly 'empty' studio."⁸⁶ Kraynak then elaborates on the environmental and spatial record which is also achieved by the footage of Nauman's studio performances:

As a result, the spectator becomes attentive to the previously unnoticed details and elements: piles of detritus lying haphazardly about; the white square taped to the floor, which is used in two of the films as a choreographic template; and in particular the sounds that are byproducts of Nauman's performed actions.⁸⁷

The incessant sounds of the artist's feet, dissonance of the violin, the bouncing balls, the atmospheric noise of the space itself, come together in an aural mélange of an active body in a studio. Janet Kraynak emphasizes the importance of the sonic aspect of these studio films:

The studio films are as much sonic works as visual ones. Following Cage's example, Nauman's films represent the body as an instrument: that is, something capable not just of demonstrating gesture and movement but also of producing sound.⁸⁸

These body-centered studio activities find their way into his work in an array of ways.

There are sculptural objects which derive from measurements or casts of molds taken directly from his body are one way this happens, as in works such as *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body at Ten-Inch Intervals* (1966) or *The Space Under My Hand While Writing My Name* (1966). Yet, at times these corporeal activities inform the work in much more subtle ways, for instance, in the case of *Double Steel Cage Piece*. The path between the cages in this work clearly shares geometry with the "square dance" performances for film, yet it also requires the viewer to traverse the square perimeter as the artist had in these previous performances. So essentially, these earlier studio exercises, where the artist has confined his action to a square perimeter of tape within a much larger studio, acts as a model for the way he would confine the spectator to the squarish path within the *Double Steel Cage Piece*. The formal and the embodied knowledge which was garnered by these performances in 1967-68, thus informs this large spatial installation in

1974. The confines and parameters that an artist allows for the work are not only required by himself within the role of performer, but also by the viewer when they are cast into this role. In regard to limiting the participant's interactive experience within the work Nauman states:

Because I don't like the idea of free manipulation. I really had more specific kinds of experience in mind and, without having to write out a list of what they should do, I wanted to make kind of play experiences unavailable, just by the preciseness of the area.⁸⁹

Curator Susan Cross, considering the influence of Nauman performance on his work states:

They would set the stage, so to speak, for many of his subsequent works that used performance as a conduit for heightened self-awareness (for both Nauman and the viewer). The artist's formal treatment of the body quickly evolved into a deeper psychological investigation of the self and human experience.⁹⁰

Double Steel Cage Piece, at least formally, is adjacent to "primary structures" of Minimalism. The work is industrial in materials and tone, and geometrically elegant. There do not seem to be any shortcomings to its design and fabrication, no adjustments to the scale or geometry that would make it more effective; in fact, there are multiple iterations of this work which are suited to their site, all sharing a similar and confining proportion. The piece blatantly disregards any variation in the viewer's anatomy. Like much of his early work, it was built to the proportions of Nauman's lean figure. There is an implied dominance of this structure, the viewer must almost leave their state of being at the entrance of the cage. Once inside you are confined, forced to shuffle along sideways and face the empty inner cage while being watched by others in the room you can't see. The inner cage is vacuous and physically impenetrable. If facing the outside of the cage, you feel left out because you are missing the view of the inner part of the structure and

are forced to stare at a blank wall or others in the room.

Eugen Blume offers these thoughts: “Inside the cage we become ‘raw material’ obliged to test our human condition under the harshest physical and psychological conditions, to seek out an independent form of life for which we alone are responsible.”⁹¹ The viewer in this work is put to a test of self-awareness and their ability to embrace this structural allegory of solitude. There is indeed a carceral feeling within this sculpture; it is a meditation on isolation and emptiness. An embodied viewing of this work could elicit a gamut of possible subjective responses from the participant. Beyond a claustrophobic reaction to this work, anyone with trauma related to incarceration or captivity would have a visceral response to confinement within the cage. The unending rectilinear path between the cages suggests an interminable duration, such as the monotony of pacing the perimeter of a cell.

The artist Mona Hatoum is well-versed in work that interrogates institutional violence and incarceration. *Hatoum’s Cube*, 2006, is of particular interest in relation to Bruce Nauman’s *Double Steel Cage Piece*. This steel-lattice cube’s proportions are a direct reference to the body’s scale, and much like the inner cage in Nauman’s piece, it is vacant and physically impenetrable. Curator Nancy Spector states: “the quadrilateral form has no entrance or exit; the steel rods run uninterrupted on every side to form what is unmistakably a cage. This otherwise abstract form morphs into a prison cell, a holding pen, a vessel for confinement.”⁹² Hatoum realizes the strategies of Minimalism and Post Minimalism in the repetitive-prefabricated-ordered-seriality of the grid, box, cube, and modular structure. *Cube* shares an aesthetic sensibility with carceral and institutional designs of confinement. A number of contemporary artists have found the tried and true methods of abstraction useful well after the heyday of Minimalism. Mona Hatoum has used these aesthetic strategies with a barbed sense of irony, while bringing in her own agenda and content. Spector adds: “For Hatoum, the cube, the grid, and the sphere were historical forms waiting to be

activated by narratives that were, in themselves, expressly rooted in bodily experiences."⁹³ By mastering the language of these structures, Hatoum is actively debunking and critiquing them as a profound act of reclamation and recontextualization.

Nancy Spector describes the correlation between Minimalist and carceral structures:

The equation between the 'primary structure' of Minimalist art and structures of incarceration has not been lost on revisionist critics who interrogated the authoritative discourse surrounding



Figure 15. Cube, Mona Hatoum, 2006.

the work, noting especially the male-gendered rhetoric used to describe its formal attributes. Hatoum expertly conflates the ideas of imprisonment with the serial objects of her (male) forebears, bringing to the surface notions of discipline and punishment embedded within them.⁹⁴ (see Fig. 15)

Mona Hatoum's *Cube* and Bruce Nauman's *Double Steel Cage Piece* both speak of dominance, coercion, confinement, boundary, exile, emptiness, isolation, alienation, and institutionalization. Bruce Nauman is just more cryptic about his intentions with *Double Steel Cage*. In fact, he has never come forth with any acknowledgement of a political message with this particular work, but that just shows how long Nauman can keep a poker face. *Double Steel Cage Piece* is featured in the Political Art chapter of Peter Plagens' comprehensive monograph of *Bruce Nauman* titled *Bruce Nauman: The True Artist*. It seems after a while it doesn't matter how cryptic you are about your work, critics will reveal "truths" about it, regardless of whose truths they are, or how speculative. Constance Lewallen proves this point with the following reference to prisoner of war cages: "Nauman has said of this piece it is more emotional than political, but one cannot escape the association with prisons, in particular the so-called Vietnamese tiger cages in which men and women were confined and tortured during the Vietnam War."

Bruce Nauman purposefully stopped short at specific references in this work, yet still had to field many inquiries about its content. Nauman comments: "I didn't do anything like that for a long time after because I was scared to really focus on these loaded subjects." The work provokes an intense awareness of self in the viewer, and evokes strong emotion about the human condition. It is visceral and demanding, it is still doing everything it was meant to do when it was first made in 1974. Architect Bernard Tschumi comments on overt methods of imbuing a space with a psychological charge:

Such discomfiting spatial devices can take any form: the white anechoic chambers of sensory deprivation, the formless spaces

leading to psychological destructuring. Steep and dangerous staircases, those corridors consciously made too narrow for crowds, introduce a radical shift from architecture as an object of contemplation to architecture as a perverse instrument of use.⁹⁵

Tschumi adds: “At the same time it must be stressed that the receiving subject—you or I—may wish to be subject to such spatial aggression.”⁹⁶ Whether the viewer wishes to be subjected to a “spatially aggressive” environment or not, it is clear that the artist, architect, and designer may potentially induce such a response in the viewer. And very few are able to do it as well as Bruce Numan.

II. The Paradox of the Labyrinth

1. Artists Imagine the Labyrinth

It was under English trees that I meditated on that lost labyrinth: I pictured it perfect and inviolate on a secret summit of a mountain; I pictured its outlines blurred by rice paddies, or underwater; I pictured it as infinite—a labyrinth not of octagonal pavilions and paths that turn back on themselves, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms...I Imagined a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes, a twisting, turning, ever-widening labyrinth that contained both past and future and somehow implied the stars.⁹⁷

—Jorge Luis Borges

The labyrinth as an archetypal form has its beginnings in mythic beliefs around creation, fertility, nature, and passage of time. The cup and ring markings, spirals, and early labyrinth depiction date back to prehistory. Art Historian Lucy R. Lippard comments: “the cosmic/visceral labyrinth, an image found world-wide, dating back to the third millennium B.C. and best known in the “Cretan” incarnation, as it appeared on a coin from Knossos.”⁹⁸ The widespread dissemination and shared beliefs around this symbol is astounding.

The “lobed labyrinth,” which is either round or square, has been found in regions as scattered as the British Isles, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Scandinavia, Asia, and the southwestern United States. This labyrinth also features seven rings, just like the Cretan labyrinth.

Lippard adds: “Everywhere it symbolizes initiation and birth, death and rebirth—the return to the center or the womb. The true labyrinth (also related to the Great Goddess) has a single path to the center that traces every ring, moving away from the center before reaching it.”⁹⁹ In ancient Greek mythology, the center of the labyrinth was occupied by the Minotaur, yet in many other myths of the labyrinth there is some kind of transcendent experience to be had in the center of the labyrinth. Lippard relates the fundamental and mystic nature of the labyrinth which has played an integral role in far flung cultures since prehistoric times:

The concentric circle, the spiral, the meander, the zig zag, the lozenge or diamond shape, the line in the landscape, the passage, and labyrinth and welcoming, terrifying shelter are still meaningful to us, even if we cannot cite their sources and symbolic intricacies. These forms have some basic connection to human identity, confirming bonds we have almost lost with the land, its products and cycles, and with each other.¹⁰⁰

The process of engaging with this archetypal form can produce a spectrum of results. The labyrinth has been explored in such manifold ways that, depending on the approach, can produce everything from a meditative or transcendent experience to chaotic and discomfiting; much like our paths in life. In his 1974 essay, *The Architectural Paradox*, Architect Bernard Tschumi discusses spatiality within the scope of a paradox of architecture. On one hand there is the mental construct, immaterial and theoretical, which he refers to as “the Pyramid,” and on the other hand is experiential investigation of space through praxis, which he refers to as “the Labyrinth.” In this inquiry he is also examining the antithetical nature of these terms along with the various possibilities of escaping this paradox. The fact that Tschumi uses “the Labyrinth” as an allegory for embodied experience of space is telling of their nature. By being both passage and architecture, they must be traversed physically, unless you are able to enter them spiritually or mentally without

the aid of the body. Here the architect and writer Francesca Tatarella eloquently conveys the hybrid nature of the mazes and labyrinths:

While in most types of architecture a path is simply an element which leads to other places, in a maze or a labyrinth the path is the architecture. In other words, the path is not just a means of moving from one place to another but a destination in and of itself. To move through a maze is to travel its path. “*Solvitur ambulando*” (it is solved by walking).¹⁰¹

By walking a labyrinth or maze you are, through an act of praxis, experiencing space sensorially. The labyrinth is a paradoxical form, it is a trope, it is mythic, and allegorical. The mythic and historical lineage of the labyrinth is vast, and with many variations and intricacies of spiritual and cultural meaning that we shall avoid a comprehensive account. If we were to attempt such, we would be entering into a labyrinth or maze of text. Instead we will examine a couple of contemporary artists who engage with the labyrinth in their work.

The artist Alice Aycock’s *Maze* was sited at the Gibney Farm near Kingston, Pennsylvania, and completed in July of 1972. There is an iconic grainy black and white photograph of this work, and on the artist’s current website, the photo credit for this image is attributed to Silver Spring Township Police Department of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. This photographic image is how most of us know and remember this sculptural work. The image gives the viewer an idea of the unique twelve-sided form and the network of passages which take place within the structure. (see Fig. 16)

Maze was the first large-scale site-based work of Alice Aycock. Impressively, this ambitious project was taken on just a year out of graduate school. She studied with the artist Robert Morris at Hunter College, graduating in 1971. Both Morris and Aycock have made works exploring some overlapping territory such as phenomenology, ancient civic architecture, labyrinths, and mazes. *Maze* was massive compared



Figure 16. Maze, Alice Aycock, 1972.

to anything Aycock had built up to that point, and this project pointed toward the scale and complexity of work she would come to pursue throughout her career. Most of her sculptural work from this point forward is at least human-scale and demands some extent of physical exploration. Aycock makes mention of the reciprocal relationship between the body, mind, and spatial experience:

In general the work included here reflects the notion that an organism both selects and is selected by the environment. The

structures, i. e. spaces and materials of construction, act upon the perceiver at the same time as the perceiver acts on or with the structures. The spaces are psychophysical spaces.¹⁰²

The relationship that Aycock was interested in fostering through these works was a reciprocal or symbiotic relationship between the viewer and the space. Alice Aycock's exploration of the form of the maze and labyrinth in her work was informed by her interest in the embodied experience of orientation. It seems that the blind Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges also used the labyrinth as a way to navigate his interest in orientation. Aycock relates this interest in orientation in conjunction with this Borgesian inquiry and enclosed architectural spaces:

Up, down, left, right, backwards, forwards; these are the six dimensions of space as defined by the writer Borges. These dimensions comprise a set of sensory motor directions which the body must comprehend in order to orient itself in the world. These directions are also operational when one experiences architecture or, more simply, enclosed spaces.¹⁰³

Maze, this architectural space that Aycock made on the Gibney Farm, was roughly 32 feet in diameter and 6 feet high. Constructed entirely out of wood, the walls looked much like wood fencing. It was 12-sided and consisted of five concentric dodecagonal rings with a void in the center. Once inside the singular point of entry, the space was broken up by an additional 18 thresholds and 17 barriers. It seems that part of the motivation behind this work was to create a system of explorative orientation for the perceiver. The complexities of the structure were only knowable through direct experience, an experience which could only unfold through this durational exchange between the viewer and the space. Ideally, the participant would have a certain amount of patience and intuition, a connection with this process which would guide them as they navigated the space. Aycock comments: "The works are exploratory situations for the perceiver. They can be known only by moving one's body through them. They involve experiential time and

memory.”¹⁰⁴ The contingency of the corporeal interaction and process of gradual discovery within this articulated space, creates a durational relationship between the environment and the body.

The way that Alice Aycock was interpreting spaces as contingent upon the moving body in relation to the environment recalls this passage by philosopher Michel de Certeau: “In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs.”¹⁰⁵ *Maze* contains many complexities within its interior. On one hand the structure is grounded in a phenomenological experience of space which carries out an intuitive exploration, a psychophysical encounter with the work. This encounter, however, is very subjective and could produce everything from a meditative and transformative time in the maze, to a terror inducing experience. This open system that the artist created is one intention of the work, but it seems that another motivation for Aycock was to create works that challenge her own limits, both physically and mentally. Aycock comments: “The work satisfies my need to deal with both ideas and physical things and my megalomaniac and somewhat destructive need to take on more than I can handle.”¹⁰⁶ If we examine both the integrated experience she is cultivating for the viewer and acknowledge some of the darker aspects of the artist’s motivations, we can see the possibility of these darker aspects being integrated in the work. Aycock adds: “the construction tests the limits of my physical strength. I often feel that I am in over my head. The works are a synthesis. They give me pleasure. They turn back on history and back on themselves.”¹⁰⁷ Her relationship to her creative work is both self-destructive and self-affirming at the same time. However, one must consider that the personal trials and tribulations that the artist undergoes while realizing the work may somehow become imbued in the work itself, especially when making spatial encounters which are to be perceived in such a personal and sensorial manner.

Alice Aycock's inspirations for the designs of the structure also seem to be a bit culturally discursive, some might even say problematic or troubling. Aycock comments: "The maze has the appearance of a hill fortification. I was influenced by the American Indian stockade and the Zulu kraal. I got the idea while paging through the *World Book* for the definition of *magnetic north*, and I accidentally came across a circular plan for an Egyptian labyrinth. The labyrinth was designed as a prison." It is interesting that she happened on this labyrinth design while searching for a definition of magnetic north. Rather than attempting to psychoanalyze Aycock or dismiss the artist for reinterpreting a structure which has a complex cultural history, it's important to be open to the circuitous path of intuition which seems to have found its materialization in *Maze*.

Aycock describes some of the mythic and architectural connotations of the original Egyptian labyrinth:

The temple dedicated to Asclepius as healer at Epidaurus was composed of a circular stepped platform and twenty-six outer Doric columns axially aligned with fourteen black and white tiles, surrounded a center spiral staircase which led to the center of the labyrinthine structure. From the center pit one moved to the "dead end of the outer ring" underneath the temple. The name of the building recorded on an inscription is Thymela or Place of Sacrifice.¹⁰⁹

Aycock mentions another maze in Britain which is located near a burial mound called a tumulus. She states: "A fourteenth-century maze at Wing, Rutland, England, is located near an ancient tumulus. The maze was used as a form of penance."¹¹⁰ Bernard Tschumi comments on the allegory of the Labyrinth as a place to escape:

Denis Hollier, in his book on Georges Bataille, points out that from Bacon to Leibniz the Labyrinth was linked with the desire to get out, and science was the means of finding an exit. Rejecting

such an interpretation, Bataille suggested that its only effect was to transform the Labyrinth into a banal prison.¹¹¹

While the work itself is not rooted steadfastly in any of the unsettling beliefs which informed the design of her structure, it is possible for anyone, including Aycock, to lose their way both literally and figuratively and perhaps reach high levels of anxiety and frustration. Aycock adds: “I took the relationship between my point of entry and the surrounding land for granted, but often lost my sense of direction when I came back out. From one time to the next, I forgot the interconnections between the pathways and kept discovering new sections.”¹¹² Alice Aycock made a work which would test her mental and physical limits, and that she could lose her way within. This work was important for Aycock on many levels: it was explorative, disorienting, and after making *Maze*, her art practice was transformed.

Her seemingly haphazard process has parallels to some comments the philosopher Michel Foucault made in an interview regarding his method of writing books. Foucault states: “What I think is never quite the same, because for me my books are experiences, in a sense, that I would like to be as full as possible. An experience is something one comes out of transformed.”¹¹³ He goes on: “I write a book only because I still don’t exactly know what to think about this thing I want so much to think about.”¹¹⁴ Some artists approach a work after very careful planning and sustained deliberations. The executed artwork is a culmination of these measured actions. It may seem preposterous to some, but a lot of artists are closer to what Foucault is talking about, this eagerness to make adjustments, and “to find their way” within the work.

Initially *Maze* was going to be larger. As this was Aycock’s first major site-based work, she quickly figured out how expensive artmaking can be, and built the work in a slightly more modest scale. Luckily the work was still quite substantial and provided the core experience she had initially sought out. Aycock comments: “When I realized the expense and difficulties involved in building so large a circular structure, I cut

out the four exterior rings and reorganized the plan as an axial alignment along the cardinal points of the compass."¹¹⁵ *Maze*, as it was built on open farmland, was able to be viewed while far afield which was important to her at the time. She adds: "The works are sited in terms of pre-existing landscape features and are visible from a distance like a Greek temple."¹¹⁶ Part of the disillusionment which ensued upon entering the structure were due to the transition from open field to a cloistered atmosphere and lack of visibility within the structure. This shift from a wide open plain to a complicated architecture of passageways would tremendously alter the viewer's visual perception as well as their proprioception. Walter Benjamin in *One-Way Street* emphasizes the disorientation one experiences regularly in the perspectival shifts experienced on walks in the urban environment, which are not dissimilar to the sudden shift from field to maze. Walter Benjamin here describes the collapse of perspectival distance and the confusion which ensues due to this shift:

As soon as we begin to find our bearings, the landscape vanishes at a stroke like the façade of a house as we enter it. It has not yet gained preponderance through a constant exploration that has become a habit. Once we begin to find our way about, the earliest picture can never be restored.¹¹⁷

This collapse of architecture's perspectival distance suggests also a collapse of time and space. One of the characteristics of Tschumi's "Labyrinth" is that the experiencer, while they can behold the Labyrinth in part, cannot see the Labyrinth in its entirety at any point. Bernard Tschumi comments: "One can participate in and share the fundamentals of the Labyrinth, but one's perception is only part of the Labyrinth as it manifests itself. One can never see it in totality, nor can one express it. One is condemned to it and cannot go outside to see the whole."¹¹⁸ Just as Benjamin found this collapse both intriguing and distracting, the conundrum of Tschumi's Labyrinth is that there is this inherent impossibility of realizing the Labyrinth in totality because of

the subjective nature of the experience. Tschumi elaborates upon the variables introduced when one breaches the Labyrinth through direct experience:

To talk about the Labyrinth and its praxis means to insist here on its subjective aspects: it is personal and requires an immediate experience. Opposed to Hegel's *Erfahrung* and close to Bataille's "interior experience," this immediacy bridges sensory pleasure and reason. It introduces new articulations between outside and inside, between private and public spaces. It suggests new oppositions between dissociated terms and new relations between homogeneous spaces.¹¹⁹

Tschumi sees a way out of the architectural paradox by blending "system and excess," and this is only possible as a result of transcendence. Tschumi states: "As long as social practice rejects the paradox of ideal and real space, imagination—interior experience—may be the only means to transcend it."¹²⁰ Perhaps this imagination, this interior experience, as expressed through the creative act, can be transcendent. Even as materialized in the form, the articulated space, of the labyrinth itself. (see Fig. 17)

Lastly, we should circle back to one other key statement made by Aycock in relation to highways and Borges:

Like the experience of the highway, I thought of the maze as a sequence of body/eye movements from position to position. The whole cannot be comprehended at once, it can only be remembered as a sequence. I was asked if I thought a maze was a basic form like a circle and a square. No, not exactly. But it seems to be a recurrent need—an elaboration of the basic concept of the path. I certainly intended to tap into that tradition. And what about Borges' reference to that "one Greek labyrinth which is a single, straight line...invisible and unceasing."¹²¹



Figure 17. Maze, (detail of interior), Alice Aycock, 1972.

Tschumi poetically captures this allegory of the Labyrinth: “Just as language gives us words that encircle us but that we use in order to break their surround, the Labyrinth experience was full of openings that did not tell whether they opened toward its outside or inside.”¹²² Alice Aycock’s *Maze* is fraught with spatially induced struggle, and brings about a challenge to the viewer. Great patience and perseverance is required to find one’s way through these complex labyrinthine passageways. The spectrum of experience the participant may have within *Maze* is wide-ranging and unknowable without the direct physical immersion which the work requires.

Things outside you are projections of what’s inside you, and what’s inside you is a projection of what’s outside. So when you step into the labyrinth outside you, at the same time you’re stepping into the labyrinth inside.¹²³

—Haruki Murakami

The artist Motoi Yamamoto has approached the making of labyrinths as a spiritual process. Yamamoto lost his younger sister to brain cancer when he was 24 years old, the artist was shattered by this event and sometime after began making drawings and sculptures out of salt. The artist had forged a relationship with salt while mourning his sister, and this choice of material coincides with the spiritual aspect of the labyrinth and also has a connection with death. Salt is venerated and used to heal, cleanse, and purify in various aspects of Japanese culture, such as Shintoism and Buddhism, as well as in traditional funerals. Historian Mark Kurlansky comments: “When mourners return home, they purify themselves, or drive away evil, by rubbing *kiyone shio*, funeral salt, on their hands.”¹²⁴ At Buddhist funerals, many times salt is proffered to attendees as they depart the memorial, which they are to use

to purify the space and ward off evil spirits. Kurlansky adds: "Japanese Buddhists sometimes hold a ceremony seven days after a death, in which brine is ceremoniously sprinkled." The importance of salt to these various aspects of traditional Japanese culture does help ground the use of this unconventional medium; however it is the use of the medium, in connection with the labyrinth form and other motifs explored by the artist, which elevate the work. Curator Nakao Usuki comments: "Drawing patterns with salt is, for the artist, like a voyage to the heart of memories that are fading away and transforming from time to time."

Many of Yamamoto's salt drawings are site-determined and the material itself is affected by the regularity of the surface he is working on and the conditions of the space itself, such as the presence of humidity in the air. The intricate fields of pattern are meditatively laid out by the artist using a tool which funnels the salt out into lines. The work is done intuitively, and with such deftness that the lines are spaced

and interconnected in an unfathomable geometry. Drawing with this medium of salt does, of course, create some gradient between the lines due to loose granules. These slight inconsistencies are unavoidable, and the weight of the salt lines always end up anchoring the composition. The ephemerality of this material links to the artist's pursuit of memory as it fades into the sea of time. Yamamoto writes: "Drawing a labyrinth with salt is like following a trace of my memory."¹²⁶ The web of salt lines in a way is materializing the traces of memory and creating a space for them to exist in, even momentarily.

Creating these site-determined drawings in space is a ritual in itself. This work is along the lines of the sacred sand paintings of Tibetan Buddhists or the Diné (Navajo). These ceremonious and sacred works such as Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas, the sand paintings of the Diné people, and the salt drawings of Motoi Yamamoto are dispersed sometime after they are completed. Both the sand mandalas and the salt drawings of Yamamoto are returned to bodies of water. Curator Mark Sloan comments on the return to water of sand mandalas and

Yamamoto's salt drawings: "In both cases the work is destroyed at the end of a predetermined interval and returned to a body of water, thus enacting the circularity and ephemerality of life. Both are used to induce meditation and to access deeper regions of human consciousness."¹²⁷

When Motoi Yamamoto "returns the salt to the sea" at the end of his exhibitions, it is a ritual act which the artist sometimes performs with others as a social practice that is shared with members of the community. This act of erasure and return to emptiness captures the essence of Buddhist philosophies of non-attachment. The use of salt as a medium operates on many levels throughout the work. There is a temporality of the traces he draws in space, and the symbolic and sometimes social gesture of the erasure and return. Then, of course, there are the cleansing and healing properties inherent to this sacred mineral in traditional Japanese culture. (see Fig. 18)

The salt lines drawn by Yamamoto connote an interconnectedness of



Figure 18. Solo exhibition; SALZ, Motoi Yamamoto, 2010.

living beings and the labyrinthine lines suggest both a mapping of this interconnectivity and the fragility of existence. Curator and art critic Nakao Usuki states: “The salt maze which is like wind patterns in the sand spread ahead like a sea of clouds to the end of the space of the gallery. It continues and becomes the mass of the salt in white, which is almost making our thoughts terminate.”¹²⁸ The labyrinth drawings of salt, the nets or fields of filigree lines, are spaced and laid unto the site’s surface with such deliberation and attentiveness that the artist seems to be channeling this ability from the beyond. As the artist works within a space, inconsistencies to the surface as parameters of the existing architecture guide the process along with chances. Nakao Usuki comments on the intuition and chance which come into play when Yamamoto is making a salt labyrinth:

Often there are lines and corners which are not intended by the artist but realized through the entanglements of chance and inevitability. Finishing the process and reaffirming the difficulties in trying to approach the ultimate source of his memories, Yamamoto’s gaze silently traces back to the origin of the labyrinth as if confirming “the distance between death and himself.”¹²⁹

As the scale of these installations are at times epic, the work is read as universal, meaning that these lines, this intricate labyrinth of salt is edging toward more of an all-encompassing meaning that radiates well beyond the artist’s individual life. Usuki speaks to the allegorical nature of the labyrinth form in the artist’s work:

The salt, which Yamamoto employs as the material that bears what he calls the ‘memories of the creatures,’ could be seen as something connecting all the memories of countless numbers of lives, and the labyrinth renders itself as a kind of prototype which lets those memories circulate. ‘Labyrinth’ evokes an imperative truth for humankind that is also an annihilation of living creatures; paradoxically, but vividly, it lets us be aware of life. The labyrinth of life with its alluring transparency inspires and

engenders an energy to flow towards viewers' bodies, releasing a positive aura.¹³⁰

These salt installations are intentionally left partially undone. There are voids and absences which give the eye another place to fall. These areas of emptiness also speak of loss and fading memory, the ideas of potentiality of space, or the fissures and irregularities of nature and life. Many times, Yamamoto leaves large mounds of “undrawn” salt near the intricate finished salt work. This speaks volumes about the volume of salt the artist uses and about also the arduous process of translating a vast mound into the “salt sentences” which make up the language of a labyrinth. The act of leaving mounds of salt for good fortune is a custom in Japanese culture as well. Mark Kurlansky comments: “Even today, many Japanese restaurants try to assure their success by placing *mori shio*, mound salt, outside the establishment at the start of the day.”¹³¹ While Yamamoto’s process of leaving *mori shio* may be a nod to this ancient custom, it spiritually and aesthetically relates to his process of making this meditative and ethereal work. Art writer Kai Ozawa captures the direct experience of a Yamamoto salt labyrinth:

Another labyrinth emerges more clearly toward the foreground from a mass of salt in the depths of a space. On closer inspection at these installation works, although they have been finished and shown to the public, the labyrinth seems to be incomplete, not fully closed and suspended in its process of emerging. This implies a potential that the installations might expand beyond their immediate space or conversely shrink to nothing.¹³²

Motoi Yamamoto uses tonnages of salt to make these vast installations, and at the same time the work becomes so lace-like and delicate. The idea of transformation, both metaphysical and physical, is embodied in this spectrum of weight and scale which is realized by the work. The space has been transformed in such a way that even the light travels differently within the space, as in a snow laden landscape.



Figure 19. Force of Nature, Motoi Yamamoto, 2006.

(see Fig. 19). This expansive and prolific use of this mineral to make the labyrinths enervates the site in unforeseen ways. The viewer is met with a deluge of material, an endless network of passages drawn in space. The work comes across as a spiritual intervention and collides boldly yet light-footedly with the inherent histories and contexts of the installation site, Kai Ozawa elaborates on this aspect of the work:

Yamamoto's installations could give rise to an experience which shakes one's socially tamed physicality and, at the same time, induces it into another layer of space. In this, one remains in the realm of a perspective which has been formed within social discourse; but one might also sense a wind blowing from an interstice of this realm.¹³³

The form and space of the labyrinth can be engaged with in so many different ways. For Yamamoto, it has been an allegory for interconnectedness and a materialization of memory's traces. There is a cleansing of the spirit, a spaciousness and meditative aspect that the work lends to the site and the viewer. At the same time the work contemplates loss and mortality; there is a darkness that enters into these works, which is knowable in the negative spaces, fissures, voids, and sometimes rust. Kai Ozawa comments on these negative spaces in Yamamoto's salt labyrinths:

Yamamoto's works give a sense of a device that enables the viewers to be aware of what is thought to be unconceivable or what has been concealed and neglected by the society despite the fact that death has always been there. The void of an image in the darkness is a crack which induces the feeling of the unknowable beyond our everyday life. In that, one might be led to a sacred sphere through the path of salt.¹³⁴

These salt works hybridize drawing and sculpture in a way that elevates both modalities, you get a bit of both in his work. The fact that the viewer doesn't actually need to walk within these works as a way to experience the labyrinthine pathways is intriguing. The scale and spatiality of the work and sheer volume of the salt do induce a sensorial response in the viewer, except they do not need to enter into the labyrinth itself to experience the work. The inner experience and mindfulness of this process is actually what the embodied walking was meant to bring about, in labyrinths that are meant to be traversed.

III. Drawing in Space

Allowing a Drawing Which is a Work Unto Itself to Assume the Role of Proposal for Sculpture

We must keep from going very near the Pyramids just as much as we keep from going too far from them, in order to get the full emotional effect from their size. For if we are too far away, the parts to be apprehended (the stones lying one over the other) are only obscurely represented, and the representation of them produces no effect upon the aesthetical judgement of the subject. But if we are very near, the eye requires some time to complete the apprehension of the tiers from the bottom up to the apex, and then the first tiers are always partly forgotten before the imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension of them is never complete.¹³⁵

—Immanuel Kant

Agnes Denes, who is best described as a visionary, emerged into the burgeoning art scene of New York in the 1960s and 1970s and was a pioneer in Land Art, ecological art, social practice, new media, and conceptual art. She creates work in a broad range of media, while utilizing various disciplines—science, philosophy, linguistics, ecology, psychology—to analyze, document, and ultimately aid humanity. The

artist turns her analysis into beautiful, sensual visual forms, poetry, and a visual philosophy that she has developed over the course of her career. Denes truly is before her time and many of her works will remain unrealized in her lifetime. Many of her drawings are proposed projects for architectures which are to be built in the future when the society has the means to realize them.

From October 9, 2019–March 22, 2020, The Shed in New York hosted a comprehensive exhibition of Agnes Denes' work spanning her 50-year career. As part of this exhibition, titled *Agnes Denes: Absolutes and Intermediates*, they commissioned work by Agnes Denes to be realized as part of the show. One commission was *Model for A Forest for New York*, 2019. This project was originally a 2014 proposal by Denes, an environmental intervention to plant a forest on disused land. Denes comments: "The place for my forest is the Edgemere landfill in Queens, 120 acres of barren land where I plan to plant 100,000 trees specifically suited to survive in this environment."¹³⁶ The ethos behind this project is to create a healthy ecosystem which will aid in cleaning the groundwater and purifying the air. This project, like much of Denes's work, is also meant to bring about a spiritual and psychological transformation to help address the body, mind, and spirit of the community and city as a whole.

Senior Curator of the Shed, Emma Enderby, comments on works commissioned by The Shed :

The second and third commissions are both based on drawings from Denes's iconic "Pyramid Series," and its subseries the "Future City." Many of the works within this series depict realizable, future architectures —potential ways of living on the planet that, in the future, might not be inhabitable in the way that we now live on it.¹³⁷

The two drawings that informed the designs of the other commissioned models are *Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid* (50

x 50 meters, 160,000 glass blocks) (1976), and *Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound* (1984). Each of these drawings hybridize mathematical formula and scientific discovery with visionary architecture in a way that is truly unique to Agnes Denes. Here Agnes Denes describes the significance of the pyramidal theme which runs through many of her works:

Pyramids weave in and out of my work from the very beginning in diverse forms dealing with a great variety of issues important to humanity. Each form and concept represents an enigma, something to which we must respond. These forms are a “visual philosophy,” that conveys ecological, social and cultural issues in a multitude of shapes. Every pyramid and every form presents a purpose, poses a question, and seeks an answer for humanity.¹³⁸

Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid is a sizable graphite drawing on vellum. The corner of the pyramid on the lower left-hand corner is low and almost flops off the vellum. There is a weight to it, and the perspective is loose and outreaching in that corner. The rest of the drawing tightens up and retracts as the eye climbs the step or inches back to the far side of the pyramid. The edges where the sides meet are grid-hatched which is a little odd, but this provides shadow, and there is most likely some mathematical implication for this. The lines have an elegant slack representing a probability curve which connects the bottom corners of the structure to the top point. The middle of the pyramid and edges is dark, and this darkness gathers toward the far side of the pyramid, notably on the left side toward the back as the lines converge and tighten to create a dark field where the lines terminate. The fractal of the apex brick points perfectly to the center of the top edge of the vellum sheet. The lower left corner of the pyramid reaches for the left corner of the paper yet stops short and is a bit low. Due to the exaggerated perspective created by the irregular geometry the pyramid seems condensed atop as if it is sinking into itself.

Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid is monumental in vision

and also substantially looms in the space of the page as a drawing. This drawing, made in 1976, is a study for a superstructure which was to be constructed of 160,000 glass blocks. When Agnes Denes agreed to have models commissioned, she was essentially being asked for these drawings to be allowed to assume the role of “proposal drawings” for three-dimensional models of her original drawings, which could fit within the exhibition space. Emma Enderby comments on the model which was realized from Agnes Denes’ Drawing:

For The Shed, Denes designed a variation of the Crystal Pyramid, 30 by 22.5 feet at its base and 17 feet tall, composed of nearly 6,000 compostable 3-D printed bricks. Unlike the Egyptian pyramids, with their straight line from base to apex, Denes’s Crystal Pyramid that results in a gracious probability curve between points. The work is also illuminated from the inside, as in the original proposal.¹³⁹ (see Fig. 20)

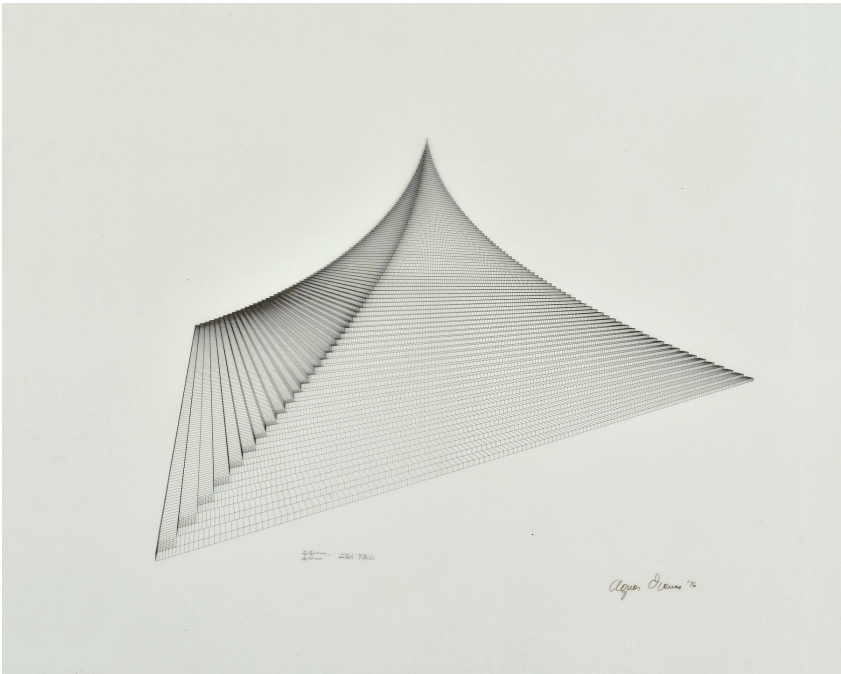


Figure 20. Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid, Agnes Denes, 1976.

When Agnes Denes did that exhibition at The Shed, she was nearly 90 years of age and she was no longer physically able to make the work. Denes in a 2018 interview with the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist comments on her physical ailments and her persistent need to still create:

My fingers don't function due to a muscle-eating disease, so I can't do my drawings anymore, but I can make more art with my mind. I also taught myself to type with flat fingers, and I am writing two books. Creativity is in my blood.¹⁴⁰

It is wonderful that the Shed commissioned these new works to be made, to help more fully visualize the artist's philosophy. The commissions are approved and designed by the artist. These works commissioned by *The Shed* are essentially models for this still unrealized future architecture. So, as Agnes Denes agreed for these works to be commissioned, her original artworks indeed became proposals for the models, which are really sculptural works in and of themselves (even if they don't rival the scale of the ancient Egyptian pyramids). *Model for Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid*, 2019 is quite sizable though. At 30 x 22.5 x 17 feet tall it is well above human scale, and it dwarfs the other pyramid shaped sculptures in the exhibition space (*Pyramids of Conscience*, 2005).

To see this drawing transformed into this illuminated sculpture breathes new life into it, and helps the viewer visualize what the visionary superstructure Denes had dreamt of could be like when experienced in space. It isn't that sculpture is superior to drawing as a modality, there is a difference though in how the works are received by the viewer. This sculpture has a palpable physical presence in the space--the viewer is able to circumnavigate the work, to "feel" the work proprioceptively as the pyramid towers in its peculiar geometry. The 3-D printed bricks are transparent and reflect and refract the light in a way that is reminiscent of ice. The light emits in a magical and varied fashion which creates a luminescent geometrical composition. The *Crystal Pyramid* appears in the exhibition space as if it has always

been there or has materialized without any physical construction due to some enigmatic transmission from the beyond. Agnes Denes alludes to symbolism at play in her pyramids, “Some pyramids form matrices that embrace logical symbols, permutations working out human theoretical concepts, and there are those that represent irony or beauty like the *Crystal Pyramid*, a massive edifice with its millions of reflections.”¹⁴¹ (see Fig. 21)

Agnes Denes’s engagement with the pyramidal form is provisional. The pyramidal shape is not the primary interest, the form becomes a vessel for her ideas, a system which the pyramid and adjacent forms can help her structure and visualize. Denes comments: “in itself the pyramid isn’t important. It is a form that carries an argument.”¹⁴² For the artist these forms capture a concept within a matrix by visualizing the philosophy or argument in a structure it can be contemplated. Some of these drawings are esoteric tables of science or mathematics containing varying degrees and combinations of numbers, letters, geometry, and symbols. Some feature these complex esoteric tables and also include forms, and some contain forms and no tables. In the drawing *Pascal’s Perfect Probability Pyramid & The People Paradox–The Predicament (PPPPPPP)*, 1980, there are 16,000 human figures all drawn by Denes. All of her drawings are exquisitely rendered and infinitely complex. Denes considers her original drawing from 1976, which is part of her iconic Pyramid series:

Crystal Pyramid appears suspended over a mirror of water, which reflects in its oblique form. Access to the pyramid is from the ground below through an underwater tunnel (visible from above through a glass ceiling), which opens into the large interior where myriads of crystal-like reflections create the effect of infinity.¹⁴³

This visionary superstructure constructed from 160,000 glass blocks with half-vaults forming walls adapted to the theory of relativity and at a probability curve was envisioned by Agnes Denes as symbolic of “our era,” just as the great pyramids of Egypt symbolize ancient Egypt.

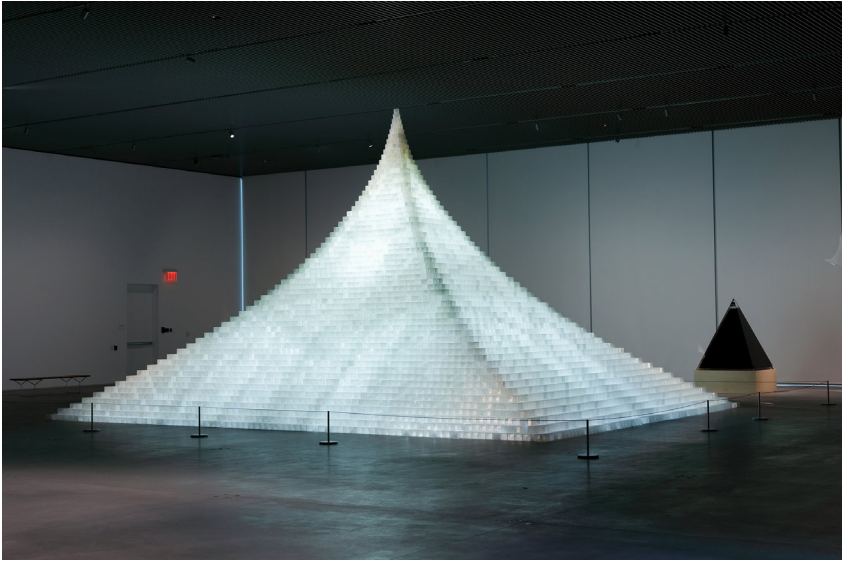


Figure 21. *Model for Probability Pyramid—Study for Crystal Pyramid*, 2019.

tian civilization. She states: “Its rhythmic form, iridescence, and apparent weightlessness set it apart to represent our era and symbolize our civilization in the centuries to come.”¹⁴⁴ It seems that some future society is meant to build this superstructure, toward the end of our time on Earth to symbolize an awakening had by humanity just at the end of our occupancy of the planet. The artist also states: “this structure is transparent and elusive in its forever-changing effects—a comment on our ideas, on our destiny, and on a universal scheme we can never totally comprehend.”¹⁴⁵

The other drawing which was assigned the role of proposal drawing for the *Absolutes and Intermediates* exhibition was the work *Model for Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound*, 2019. Agnes Denes describes the tear-drop inspired superstructure depicted in the original drawing from 1984, which is part of her *Future City* series:

The sculpture consists of a circular base and tear-drop shaped top, which levitates above the center of the base afloat on an elastic cushion of magnetic flux. The top is gently and mysteri-

ously moved about by air currents held in place by superconductive elements. When lit, the teardrop resembles the flame of a candle.¹⁴⁶

The drawing depicts the large base on the lower two-thirds of the vellum sheet. This long rectangular sheet of paper presents the forms as if in a vast deserted landscape. The base begins as an immense ellipse which has shallow steps in a radial pattern which incrementally heightens toward the center. The hub of the mandala shaped base is centered on the paper, and it's the darkest area in the drawing. The flat brick shapes which form the rings of the base foreshorten radially until they end in a small disc in the center. The layout of the forms is in four-point perspective, which pulls the gaze of the viewer into the center of the pictorial plane. The teardrop shape levitates over the central area of the base, which is accentuated by the shadowy area below. The tops of radially aligned bricks form ledges as they circle the teardrop. As the viewer's eye traverses the tiers, a serpentine pattern caused by the offset placement of brick creates a moiré effect. The bricks shrink to encircle the teardrop creating an effect of the mathematical distortion, thus making it difficult to optically apprehend the fractal nature of this drawn object. (see Fig. 22)

This drawing was one of many from the "Future City" series which is adjacent to the "Pyramid Series." Agnes Denes comments: "The habitats house around 10,000 people each. They're totally self-contained and self-supporting. They grow their own food, spin around to get the sun, and they can withstand hurricanes. This was done 50 years ago, this is my future city."¹⁴⁷ Emma Enderby expands on the ancillary function of the models commissioned by *The Shed*:

Denes envisioned an architectural structure of monumental size. However, she was, once again, ahead of her time. While future magnets and superconductors will likely be able to create a floating architecture, the monumental *Teardrop* structure remains a reality only on paper. The Shed's newly commissioned

model is a working proposal for a future monument. The 3-D printed *Teardrop* floats above its base, kept in place by a magnetic field between the two elements of the sculpture. As Denes proposed, it is lit from the inside, glowing like a candle.¹⁴⁸

The model of the teardrop is 9 ½ x 9 inches in size and levitates above the monument base which is 60 x 60 x 5 inches. This teardrop glows in a dimly lit exhibition space as it magically levitates above the base. The sculptural model transforms Agnes Denes' drawing into a tiny world and gives us a hint of what her "Future City" could be. One needs just



Figure 22. Agnes Denes in her studio, *Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound*, 1984 (in background).

to imagine this teardrop floating 100 feet above the surface of the Earth. Agnes Denes predicts that self-contained environments such as this will exist in 100-200 years. Denes comments on the inner workings of her proposed superstructure:

I need architectural drawings to go with this, to show how the elevators function inside, and how the water functions. There is a city inside this egg, and inside the teardrop. The sun is outside, but it can be brought inside, in the future they'll be able to do that. They can do it now.¹⁴⁹

Agnes Denes has the ability to imagine our reality completely transformed from how we now perceive it. The tiny world before them which enigmatically hovers above its base represents two realms. The base connects to the earth and the natural world while the levitating architecture is a glimpse of an abstract realm beyond time and space a "Future City" which operates and functions in a way not yet knowable or able to be realized. Historian and curator Lynn Gamwell, who specializes in connections between mathematics, art, and spirituality states: "*Teardrop* invites the viewer to contemplate two worlds: earthbound mortality and supernatural immortality, sense perception and reason, finitude, and infinity."¹⁵⁰ Gamwell is describing the original drawing from 1984, yet she may as well be speaking about the model which was commissioned by *The Shed*. In each work the viewer encounters the same visionary meditation on existence, perception, and mathematical sublime. (Fig. 23)



Figure 23. Model for Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound, Agnes Denes, 2019.

1. Drawing In-Between: The Cut Drawings and Index Card Notes of Gordon Matta-Clark

Might these works actually fulfill drawings terms, if in a manner so excessive that they uncover a structural tension at the very heart of the practice of drawing? There is a way that Matta-Clark's cut drawings allegorize a principle common to the range of his more graphic art, the liminality of form as erupting from the draftsman's line. Throughout the better part of his drawings, Matta-Clark's art addresses itself to the undoing of stable form, precisely through the registration of this line. In what follows, this is an activity characterized as "drawing in between."¹⁵¹

—Pamela M. Lee

A narrative thread concerning the artist Gordon Matta-Clark weaves its way throughout this Thesis paper from the Contextual Review all the way to the Conclusion of this document. In the Contextual Review we have taken a look at the artist's final building cutting, *Circus or The Caribbean Orange*, and while that work was being discussed we also examined Matta-Clark's use of photography as a way of documenting his spatial interventions and more importantly his cut and montaged or collaged images his cuttings. In this section we will delve further into two other unique intermediary methods of Matta-Clark which are adjacent to our understanding of drawing: his cut drawings and his index card notes.

The Cut Drawings of Gordon Matta-Clark

The seminal cut drawings were made in response to two of Gordon Matta-Clark's building cuttings which took place in Milan and Genoa Italy during 1973. Matta-Clark visited Italy with his partner, the artist and dancer Caroline Goodden, who was on tour with the Trisha Brown Dance Company at various locations in Europe. While there Matta-Clark was put into contact with the curator and art critic Germano Celant, who was excited about Matta-Clark's work and wanted to find him some buildings in Italy he could cut. The first project was *Infraform*, an intervention that took place at an abandoned warehouse in Milan. For this project the artist chiseled incisions by hand into the masonry walls of the warehouse, purposefully leaving uncut segments, so that the cuts could be documented in this intermediary state before being fully removed.

The masonry walls lent these pre-cuts an interesting appearance caused by the inscape of the thin line he roughed in the wall. The exposed edges of this cut drawing in the wall for the artist were revelatory. Later that year Matta-Clark would devise a way to make these very same cuts that he carved in the warehouse walls, by scoring marks into stacks of paper. Art historian Sabine Breitwieser comments on these first cut drawings, a new method the artist uncovered while working on the various projects in Italy:

Matta-Clark introduced the cut as a technique of drawing and sculpture. "A way of drawing in the same way as one makes sculptures." The first cut drawings are relatively rough and were created directly, i.e., without a sketch, using a pencil and then a saw to cut through a stack of paper. A group of four works refers to concrete projects, such as 'Infraform' (1973) in Milan or 'A W-Hole House: Rooftop Atrium Cut' (1973) in Genoa. All of them were produced in Genoa on the basis of the building cuts.¹⁵²

A W-Hole House: Roof Top Atrium and Datum Cut, 1973, was the second Italian project. Germano Celant had introduced Matta-Clark to the art dealers Paolo Minetti and Emilio Rebora who offered the artist access to a building in Genoa which was due to be demolished. This building is what the artist began to refer to as a 'throw away' building. This building was owned by a steel plant and had been used as an office for engineers who worked for the plant. Matta-Clark was intrigued by the unique divisions within the structure. The engineers had divided the interior in half to create a large drafting room. One remaining quarter was made an office, while another quarter of this small building was divided in half again. This process progressed to the point that very last space was $1/32$ of the whole. These sequential cuts were in response to the cutting of space which had been implemented by the dogmatic and utilitarian use of this building. The interior space had essentially been choked by this sequential division of the whole house. Pamela M. Lee comments the cutting into this stifled space as a way of liberating it:

The artist chiseled out the center of the pyramidal roof, which he then removed through use of the company crane. Hence the "structure was cored, walls and doors, roof and ceiling were united by a central opening," and the office was "no longer a building to separate owners from workers but a hub around which nothing but light worked."

The first five cut drawings debuted and were fabricated specifically for the *A W-Hole House* exhibition. In the exhibition the cut drawings were unframed and mounted directly to the wall, lending them a sense of urgency. These seminal works were shown alongside photographic works of building cuttings done in Italy and a couple from an earlier project in the Bronx, NY. Large sculptural artifacts such as removed sections of wall from the *W-Hole* house project were present within the exhibition space, and the extracted peak of the rooftop was placed just outside the gallery to greet attendees. *A W-Hole house: Rooftop Atrium* is a large unframed grid of nine black and white 3 x 3-inch

aerial photos of the progressive cuts and removed roof peak. Architect Mark Wigley describes Another photographic work *A-W-Hole house: 4 Ply Display (Rooftop Atrium)*: “It presented all four elevations of the decapitated house as a horizontal sequence of large cut outs, with the extracted peak attached just above the end like a punctuation mark or mathematical symbol.”¹⁵³ He goes on: “The cut drawing showing the geometry of the pitched roof was positioned immediately next to it at the same height on the adjacent wall.”¹⁵⁴ By the proximity of the cut drawing to the photo we can read an intention for the works to be operating in a didactic fashion.

All five cut drawings in the exhibition directly reference the building cuts and create a portal to the progenitorial cuts while also functioning as works themselves. The sculptural depth of the cuts and the resultant shadow within the absences present an abstract topography and confront the viewer in a way which is more physically direct than a conventional drawing. By cutting into stacked and stuccoed cardboard the artist discovered a way to reimagine this palpable experience of seeing the inscape of the cut while chiseling a masonry wall by hand during the *Infraform* project in Milan. Matta-Clark recounts this poignant moment which led to his discovery of the cut drawing process:

What seemed to happen quite naturally with masonry was that rather than dealing with the whole, the cuts became more and more palpable as things in themselves [...] There was a certain intersection of walls that I cut out of. But although I removed the area that I cut away, there was a moment when it was still standing there described only by the line of the cuts. That impressed me as much as anything I'd done up til then.¹⁵⁵

The artist Sarah Sze makes a statement about the cut drawing titled *Infraform*, which transposed the masonry cuts Matta-Clark made in Milan as a cut into a stack of stuccoed cardboard: “*Infraform* relies on the breaks in the line to create structural supports so the center doesn't fall out. They almost become like columns standing between

the voids.”¹⁵⁶ Sze goes on: “They create tension between center and periphery, interior and exterior, containment and spill, surface and center.”¹⁵⁷

Graphite marks of pencil were being used by Matta-Clark to register the building cuts in both Milan and Genoa, and pencil marks were also used to roughly indicate where the cuts in the stacked paper should be placed. So the scoring and extraction of the first building cuts were guided by the indexical mark of a pencil. The placement of the incisions in the cut drawings are also marked first with graphite. The cut drawings closed the gap between the viewer and a Matta-Clark cut without having to haul a section of a building into the exhibition space. The cut drawings also created an unforeseen way of drawing, by registering a graphic mark into a flat surface; rather than onto the surface. Gallerist John Gibson comments on the show at his gallery in 1974:

He made the most unique exhibition of drawing I'd ever seen. Each box on the floor contained a whole ream of paper. He took a saw and cut/'drew' through the whole ream—maybe 500 sheets of paper at a time. He also mounted a photograph behind each box, and did the same graphic gesture, cutting through the way he cut through the ream of paper.¹⁵⁸ (see Fig. 24)

Brion Fer speaks about the function of the cut drawings in relation to more traditional drawing techniques: “Perhaps cutting into paper was a means of knowing not so much what a drawing is as what it could do. After all, drawing had always been for him an extremely elastic way of triggering change and transformation.”¹⁵⁹ Matta-Clark uses the cut drawings in different ways. Some are made to practice or sketch out building cuts, and some continue to be done after the fact. Some of them are done independently from realized and proposed work, simply as a way to explore the spaces of absence. Sarah Sze comments on the hybrid nature of the cut drawings, and their ability to invigorate space:



Figure 24. *A W-House (Datum Cut)*, Gordon Matta-Clark, 1973.

Yeah, it's the structural problems and their solutions that make those works teeter so perfectly between drawing and sculpture. When you think about the impetus behind Gordon's work, I don't think it mattered whether it was paper, drywall, or a house—it's so driven by his self-described search to reactivate space.¹⁶⁰

Matta-Clark also intricately mapped out cuts he made in the project *Splitting* by cutting directly into pages of the artist book. Mark Wigley states: "Matta-Clark also made a one-off cut-book in which the basic section of the sliced house was cut deeply into the bound blank pages." Matta-Clark's cut drawing process also evolved as it progressed. For instance he began to incise very intricate geometric abstractions into the reams of stacked paper. Many of these cut drawings also have graphite pencil marks incorporated into the compositions, the artist purposefully leaves these ancillary marks. This act of leaving graphite marks on the cut drawings brings this process closer to drawing. Some of these reams of cut paper are stacked within wooden cases which are

placed directly onto the floor. This particular method of displaying the work is an innovative way for the cut drawings to be encountered as sculpture. In recent years Marian Goodman Gallery and David Zwirner Gallery have paired the cut drawings with recreated Matta-Clark cuts which are incised directly in the wall. Critic and poet Frances Richard elaborates on the floor-based cut drawings of Matta-Clark:

Clear and sharp, the floor-based works hold their gestalts when seen from a few feet away, and it is only when a viewer moves in tightly that these works can be read as inquiries into the nature of surface versus inscription. Up close one can peer into the mark, which is not an addition onto the paper but a piercing through it.” She adds: “The cut’s interstices are stratified like a geological core or deckle-edged book.”¹⁶²

The ability to peer into the mark is a unique aspect of the cut drawings. The marks are made by extraction, yet still perform a similar task. Each method creates lines and marks, and in each of these processes a material is diminished. In a graphite drawing the graphite is lessened by the mark marking, while in a cut drawing the paper is lessened by the mark making. The cut drawings reassign the role that the material plays in the drawing, which allows for an expanded understanding of what drawing can be as well. These works extend our understanding of the relationship between drawing and sculpture, and function as a hybrid of these two modalities.

The Index Card Notes of Gordon Matta-Clark

In Matta-Clark's art, the knife that severs unity might be an actual tool: a kitchen blade, chain saw, sledgehammer, or blowtorch. It might be a lexical insertion: a hyphen, or a strikethrough crossing out a word. The division and deferral implicit in the sign can also operate in his art through another kind of device and indexical mark it leaves behind—that is, the drawing implement and the drawing.¹⁶³

—Frances Richard

The artist Gordon Matta-Clark often mapped out ideas, and recorded thoughts, on index cards. The index cards were always unlined and came in two sizes for the most part, 3" x 5" and 4 x 6". These index card notes might be seen as a form of mark making, which is adjacent to drawing while also meeting the requirements of writing. To properly consider these index card notes to be occupying an interstice between drawing and writing requires a look at the common ground these cards share with drawing. There is a paper surface on which these graphic marks take place. The implements used in these marks are felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen, marker, and pencil. The compositions composed on the cards consist of small sketches, diagrams, symbols, numbers, text, cross outs and irregular punctuation, which in instances can be read as abstract mark making. Through the lens of contemporary art these meet the criteria for sketches of text works, which can be considered a kind of drawing.

Gordon Matta-Clark's hybrid art practice has made it somewhat difficult for art historians, critics, theorists, archivists, and art writers

to situate the terminology around some of his work. There is debate over how to refer to these cards. These index card notes are sometimes referred to as “art cards.”¹⁶⁴ Some curators (including the Canadian Centre for Architecture where Matta-Clark’s archive is held) refer to them as “Anarchitecture cards.” Both of these titles for the index cards hint at them being art. Curator Elizabeth Sussman comments on Matta-Clark’s index card notes: “He began to record and collect his thoughts, and, not wanting to organize them into discursive texts, just jotted them down as short epithets on index cards.” In Sussman next statement she compares these cards to mark making in public spaces, otherwise known as graffiti:

The language of the art cards is reminiscent of that of the Situationists, who when they infiltrated the Sorbonne Occupation Committee in May 1968, wrote slogans in public spaces (“Occupy the Factories,” “Humanity Won’t Be Happy Till the Last Bureaucrat Is Hung With The Guts Of The Last Capitalist”).¹⁶⁵

In order to have an understanding of the index card notes one must be aware of the Anarchitecture artists’ group with which Matta-Clark was associated. Many of the members of this collective lived in the Soho neighborhood of New York and had some connection to the 112 Greene St., an alternative art space run by Jeffery Lew. The group met regularly in the early 1970’s and its members included the artists: Laurie Anderson, Tina Girouard, Carol Goodden, Suzanne Harris, Jene Highstein, Bernard Kirschenbaum, Richard Landry, Richard Nonas, and Matta-Clark. Most of their “work” consisted of visionary discussions about space, fervent correspondences, and they mounted one exhibition. They were interested in alternative architectures, space which you can feel, liminal space, emotional space, overlooked and concealed space, and the potential of the awareness of these spatial circumstances. They delved into these interests mostly through some mixture of conversation, word play, and photography. Frances Richard makes remarks on the variegated functions the cards perform:

There are many correspondences between the Anarchitecture photographs and the index cards. These parallels demonstrate how Matta-Clark used his prose-poetic texts to refine associations embedded in visual artifacts—a quasi-ekphrastic game of transpositions.¹⁶⁶

Richard also outlines the attributes and functions of the Index card notes which create a discursive platform for the artist's experiments with language:

Their integrity is writing—their allusive strength as fragments—allows them to relate as completely to each other as they do to visual projects battening on the same concerns. A reader who treats the card as an integrated if indeterminate textual field will be struck by the interplay of humorous and wistful feeling, visceral and ephemeral description, that they express.¹⁶⁷

There are interesting parallels between the deconstructions and reconfigurations which the artist performed in his very physical art-making, and the deconstructions and reconfigurations which surface in his writings. The index card notes provided a platform for the artist to experiment. The liminal space which they occupy within Matta-Clark's artistic output is interesting and difficult to label. As these index cards are not on the art market they do not have an art market value as many of Matta-Clark's other art works and art related ephemera. They are preserved as a time capsule of the inner workings of Matta-Clark's mind. They are a ponderous testimony of a restless and relentlessly inquisitive wordsmith and spatial thinker. For those who find personal writings which are scribed in an artist's hand beautiful, they are beautiful. Mark Wigley comments on the significance these index cards have in the oeuvre of Matta-Clark:

They are best read as another mosaic, not just a kaleidoscopic reflection of the Anarchitectural exploration but an anarchitectural exploration in their own right, a parallel project—perhaps

even the main project for Matta-Clark.¹⁶⁸

Thus far, I have offered the reader three main sections of my Contextual Review: *Species of Spaces*, *The Paradox of the Labyrinth*, and *Drawing in Space*. The purpose of the Contextual Review was to map out and mark out a space for the work of these other theorists and artists, and my own work to co-exist. I deemed it necessary to present and elucidate the theoretical, historical, and art precedent in a way which provides the reader with an experiential understanding of the material. There is a congruity between my intentions as an artist and researcher, and my intentions as the author of this text. In order to meet the demands of my intuitive research this Thesis paper itself needed to become a poetic and immersive work of prose. Now having met this requirement the reader shall be well versed and equipped to venture forth into the remaining sections of this paper. (see Fig. 25)

MAKING THE RIGHT
CUT SOMEWHERE
BETWEEN THE SUPPORTS
AND COLLAPSE

Figure 25. Index card note, Gordon Matta-Clark, early 1970's.



METHODOLOGY

A Methodological Narrative in Three Phases

My Three-Phase Methodological Narrative is a useful way to organize and evaluate a process whose impetus is poetic and intuitive. In the Intuitive Research phase I elucidate the often fluid and improvisation-



al process my research and creative practice takes in connection with each previous work. The Making phase remains intuitive as it passes through the material and fabrication phase of the process, this phase is concerned with visualizing the research. The third phase, Spatial Narrative offers the reader an experiential walk through of each work, which together with the images create at least a semblance of the project. This experiential narrative emphasizes the relationship between spatial perception and awareness of self.

INTUITIVE RESEARCH:

I intuitively shift my research and creative practice to follow the path the work must take. Sometimes I am leading the work along and at times the work leads me. The intuitive research is informed by my cumulative experience as an artist and is guided by the overlay of this experience and the awareness and sensibility the project requires. The impetus of intuitive research comes from my innate ability to shift readings, inquiries, discoveries, and studio experiments to suit the path the work must take. Within this process I make connections between seemingly disparate notions which are able to synthesize and help catalyze and guide the research. This phase is receptive to the insights of the previous project and integrates these findings and initiates necessary shifts into the current work as the cycle resumes.

MAKING:

Overseeing and engaging in design, fabrication, and assembly of the various elements of the work, so that it may be perceived. The project continues to be intuitive and able to shift, yet the initial research has been distilled to the point that the work has reached a state of becoming. This phase also entails an embodied learning through making. Many times the project materializes through discoveries and decisions made while constructing the work. When the work is collaborative this process includes the contributions of everyone involved.

SPATIAL NARRATIVE:

I am interested in making work which allows for the viewer to contemplate the space which they occupy as well as their own inner experience. This sensibility is encapsulated in experiential narratives which capture each work from the viewer's perceptual perspective. These narratives also reveal the potentiality of inner experience or self aware-

ness which the viewer may achieve through an embodied experience of the work.

Each project will be elucidated chronologically using the Three-Phase Methodological Narrative. This narrative structure is a way to frame each work, so that the author and the reader alike, may surmise the lessons and guidance that each of these works have offered up. This narrative is modeled after the three-phase methodological structure I use to frame and organize my research and creative practice. Following each of these narrative cycles, I will briefly reflect on the project. I will now examine the previous projects I completed leading up to my MFA Thesis Exhibition.

Previous Projects

Threshold, 2019.

Ma place est au seuil.

(my place is on the threshold.)¹⁶⁹

—Edmond Jabès

INTUITIVE RESEARCH:

The first intuitive realization I had when I began my journey as an MFA candidate at Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design was that I was interested in making inquiries into the viewer's embodied perception of space. This interest in spatial encounter proved to be a generative place to begin, meaning that all my realizations and discoveries have come from this initial insight. In the spring before attending the University of Michigan, I was on a fellowship at Vermont Studio Center, and while

there I discovered these vintage Argus slide magazines while searching for materials at a thrift store. I found these objects to be exquisite miniature modular sculptures which could morph into various shapes and be stacked to create complex and elegant abstract sculptures. While in residence, I made quite a few of these stacked sculptures, and I had the epiphany of fabricating these forms out of alternative materials at a larger scale. I found it important that the work induce proprioceptive dialogue with the viewer, and that the sculptural object be at least the size of a human body. I was also researching DIY nomadic and utopian furniture and living structure designs of designer/artists such as Allan Wexler, Ken Isaacs, and Holly and Steve Baer. As I was conducting my research, I came to realize that my father had worked on a couple projects in the early eighties with Holly and Steve Baer's Zomeworks; back when we lived in Albuquerque, NM. At that moment, I acknowledged the influence of my father's own immersion into alternative modes of architecture which fed into my own interest in the potential of these innovative design strategies when adapted to a contemporary art context.

MAKING:

The work I was to make for my inaugural critique was *Threshold*. At the center of this installation are four large plywood cabinets which house modular units of pink squares of foam insulation. The plywood used to construct the cabinets were CNC milled to create the looking slots in the sides and grooves on the inside for the squares of insulation to slide into. The making of *Threshold* did indeed require a major scale-shift from model (slide magazine) to sculpture, of approximately 8:1. When the slide magazines are stacked in the configuration of *Threshold*, they stand one foot high, while *Threshold* itself measures eight feet tall. This significant shift in scale was to heighten the embodied experience of passing between the objects and allow for the effect of sound dampening due to the insulation material's proximity to the viewer's upper

body. The sculpture being made of mass-produced construction materials would lend the work a sense of humility. While there would also be a certain elegance due to the serpentine minimalist form. (see Fig. 26)

SPATIAL NARRATIVE:

In *Threshold*, the viewer crosses the threshold of the doorway to enter the space and is confronted with a second threshold. In the center of the space are two plywood towers with horizontal slots milled into their sides, through these slots you can see the serpentine curves that the pink foam boards within them create. These foam boards symmetrically jut out of the towers forming arcs in the top interior space, nearly creating an archway. The eye can follow these symmetrical curvilinear lines as they push out to form arcs at the outer bottom parts of the towers as well. As one approaches the threshold, they are able to see through the absences between the foam boards. The moment you pass



Figure 26. *Threshold*, Nathan Byrne, 2019. Photo credit: Ben Winans.

through the work you realize that you can kinesthetically feel the volume of the narrow space through which you are navigating. The acoustics of the space are dampened while immersed within the archway. The full-body scale gives this work a palpable presence in the space itself, while the modular orderliness and absences between the foam boards provide a parallax view between the liminal slots. Regardless of scale, the structure has a lightness, and the curvilinear form along with the playful palette and soft texture of the foam also induces a sense of pleasure and calm in the viewer. Upon a long shelf also fabricated from pink foam insulation, is an array of smaller sculptures made from stacked slide magazines, which resemble the larger work. These smaller works allow the viewer to imagine other possibilities of these modular sculptures, and to dream of the infinite configurations which could be made in this manner.

Reflection on Threshold:

As the title of this work suggests, the architectural inspiration for the configuration of the sculpture and the threshold signifies the allegory of stepping into the unknown. I felt compelled to make a work to materialize this emblematic threshold I was crossing, wherein form was necessitated by an outmoded archival object; in this case a slide magazine. I felt an affinity with this outmoded archival technology, and I was able to view it as an exquisite object in itself. I could also envision this object as a building unit for a symbolic threshold, of journey and transcendence. In making the work and seeing it through, I was able to accept my plight and the steps that I was taking into the unknown. The emotional landscape I was traversing brought me across the threshold, through a clearing, and along a path which led to *Elision*.

Elision, 2019.

With every mile

another piece of me peels off and whips down the road,

all down the road...¹⁷⁰

–Bill Callahan

INTUITIVE RESEARCH:

I was interested in making a work which had an awareness of the site and pushed the spatial limits of that relationship. I was simultaneously researching land art and site-based works, and decided to make a work indoors which would test the spatial limits of the site itself. Part of my reasoning when choosing this project was that I was deeply depressed and had the idea that a physically arduous and emotive work could bring about some kind of catharsis and emotional healing.

MAKING:

The decision was to site the work in a project/critique studio, which is a quite ordinary rectangular shaped space with white walls and track lighting. My goal was to completely transform the space, and in the process, to find a way to dominate and overwhelm the existing architecture spatially. While considering materials, I took up an interest in the shape and also the obsolescence of fragments of tire that I would see on the side of the freeway. I began researching where I could acquire a vast quantity of this material and found a company in Sturgis, Michigan, which produces tire derived aggregate or TDA, which

is essentially chopped tire. I decided to build a massive structure in the space and then to partially bury it in TDA. I intended for this tire material's presence to mimic a natural aggregate like dirt or gravel while also dampening the acoustics of the room significantly. I contacted Cobalt Holdings and made an appointment to pick up 3-4 cubic yards of TDA the following week. This required a reservation of a dump truck, in order to pick up and deliver the material. In the midst of all of this I designed the structure that would dominate the space, and acquired a large roll of chain link fencing, a fencing stapler, a multitude of ratchet straps, and many lengths of sizable lumber to build the sculpture. Suddenly I was immersed in the process of working with various companies to procure this vast quantity of unconventional material and deliver it safely to the Faculty/Graduate Studio for the on-site build. (see Fig.



Figure 27. *Elision*, Nathan Byrne, 2019. Photo credit: Ben Winans.

27)

SPATIAL NARRATIVE:

In *Elision*, the viewer enters a sparsely lit rectangular room with walls painted flat black, making the environment seem cave like. A massive chain-link, X-shaped structure dominates the room and divides the volume and an immense pile of chopped tires into triangular sections. These enormous empty frames enclosed in chain-link extend from the center of the space outwards and terminate just shy of the corners of the room. The spectator may circumnavigate the space by way of the narrow footpath between the darkened walls and the mounds of aggregate partially burying the structure. The damped acoustics created by the presence of tire aggregate subdues the senses, enveloping the viewer with a strange feeling of being in an underground chamber. The viewer somehow feels both a sense of safety and quasi-imprisonment. The optics of the room is obfuscated not only by the dim lighting, but also by the layered diamond-shaped patterns of the fencing material. Every aspect of perception of the space is altered by the distortion of either lack or abundance. This causes the viewer's awareness of the environment to surreptitiously be thrown back unto themselves. While the viewer may attune themselves to this environment, they must also accept the fact that normative sensorial perception will not resume while within this space.

Reflection on Elision:

This work is a materialization of the emotional void I was experiencing at the time, and became a sanctuary for self-awareness. As I intuited, I reached a state of catharsis through the physical and emotional release of materializing the inner conflict and anguish I was experiencing. It was in this work that I acknowledged this relationship between spatial and inner experience and the profound, yet unconscious influence it had on my research and creative practice. The word *elision* itself is

mostly associated with omission, yet also with the process of merging together abstract ideas. For me, the various uses and definitions of this word have been relevant to what this work has come to mean to me over time. The idea of omission and removal becomes realized by the turmoil and anguish which was lifted from me by making this work. The emptiness which results in this removal is a stripping down, a desirable emptiness. This state of emptiness or spaciousness will continue to be explored by me in my work, and proved to be an integral aspect of my Thesis Exhibition.

Passage, 2020.

I spent a lot of time looking around the gallery, and for some reason I couldn't figure out anything to do in the formal spaces. Not that anything was wrong with them; I just couldn't get a handle on what was unique about those rooms, if anything. Then I ran into the utility stairwell which presented a very interesting situation.¹⁷¹

– Robert Irwin

INTUITIVE RESEARCH:

I was interested in working in a site-based manner again, except in a way where the site itself determines the work. I had been extensively researching the methods and theory of Robert Irwin going into this project, especially in regard to his ideas about site-conditioned and site-determined sculptural responses to the environment where the

work takes place. It was time for me to make a work which had a keen awareness of site and allowed the site to help facilitate the actions which would take place therein. Going into this project I knew that I needed to abandon the project/critique studio altogether and find an area where my work could act more as a conduit for the space itself. The building in which the Faculty/Graduate Studios is located was previously a factory. It is a vast 33,000 sq. ft. space and has very interesting architectural features not seen in typical art studio spaces. For instance, there exposed industrial exhaust and conduit systems, as well as elevated walkways running throughout the building. After investigating the entire building, I chose a very unique utility stairwell to be the site for the installation. After taking measurements and conducting an intimate inspection I became interested in the prospect of working with a mirrored surface in this site as a way of activating the existing architectural space.

MAKING:

There were a couple features that intrigued me about this particular stairwell. One was the six-inch tall steel containment border around the base of the stairwell.

Secondly, the bottom side of the utility stairwell mimicked the steps of the top side. The idea was for the reflective architectural glass to be able to sit flat in geometrical patterns so as to amplify and augment the existing architectural space. The steel containment border provided a demarcated space for scalene triangles of glass to fan out into ocular configurations, while protecting the glass from being a safety concern or being tread upon. Once the glass was laid out below, I paid careful attention to the phenomenal aspects of the situation at hand. Any changes were to be determined by the site itself. I determined that lights should be embedded in the alternating gaps of the underside of the stairwell. Which would further the depth of field in the illusory

reflection of a descending stairwell, while highlighting the geometric rhythms of the architecture above the mirrored glass. Once the lights were embedded in the stairwell, I surmised that *Passage* should be shown with nearly all the lights of the surrounding space turned off, so as to better perceive the spatial-perceptual conditions at work. (see Fig. 28)

SPATIAL NARRATIVE:

In *Passage* the viewer encounters a two-tier utility stairwell in an expansive space which seems to have once been an industrial plant. Large triangular pieces of mirrored glass fan out into ocular formations at its base. The base of the stairwell itself has a raised heavy duty steel barrier which runs along the perimeter framing this array of mirrored shapes, as a body of water or liquid is framed by the edge of its container. The glass pieces lie flatly upon the floor, yet there is an unexpected portal created by them which extends the space itself, and

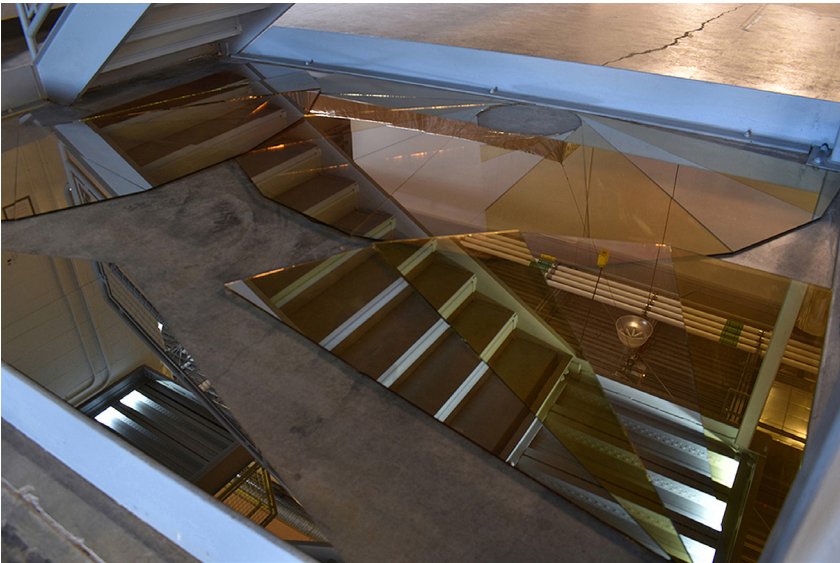


Figure 28. *Passage*, Nathan Byrne, 2020. Photo Credit: Ben Winans.

the viewer is able to plumb these depths by peering downward into a canyon of folded architecture. As one is looking downward into this submerged dreamscape, they can see light emitting from pockets in the architecture which further the spatial depth. The viewer is able to circumnavigate the area surrounding the stairwell's base, and as one ambulates around the installation, the reflected images shift as if they are peering into a zoetrope of collapsed architectural space. To experience the expanded spatiality that this installation creates involves a certain suspension of disbelief. One must allow themselves to be fully immersed in the elasticity of the spatial experience. To feel and perceive the illusion of a fractured environment which appears in the glass, while a staircase descends well below the floor on which you stand, ushering in an overlay of the actual and imagined space.

Reflection on Passage:

This work was a breakthrough in the sense that I was engaging with awareness of the site in a new way. My deep reading of Robert Irwin had encouraged me to rethink the ways that I had previously thought about site-based work. *Passage* is a work about looking, it is also about journey and transcendence. I had begun a sitting meditation practice, and while making this work I was grounded in the mindfulness and spaciousness I was entering into through my contemplative practice. After the completion of this project, I made various drawings of the installation. In one of these I wrote out the transcript of my entire critique of *Passage* in miniature text within the drawing of the installation. My perception of this project expanded into drawing and became a spatial narrative through this incorporation of text, helping me to unpack this work more fully. I began incorporating drawing into my methodology regularly after *Passage*, and also researching the connections between drawing, writing, and sculpture. These discoveries and insights into my creative practice proved vital to the processes which would follow, such as using spatial narrative as a way of drawing the

project with prose.

The Pencil Zone: Drawings of Robert Walser's Microscripts, 2020.

It seems to me this day a robust quantity of inexhaustibilities
resides within my person.¹⁷²

–Robert Walser

INTUITIVE RESEARCH:

By March of 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing. All classes at the University of Michigan had gone remote, and the Faculty/Graduate Studio was no longer accessible to me and my MFA cohort. I was placed in a position where I needed to find new ways to conduct my research and creative practice. I had recently been incorporating drawing into my methodology, and now it seemed that it was time for drawing to take center stage. All my previous projects required space for the work to be made and to be documented. With no studio space and no installation space I needed to devise a way to make a body of work which could pack away in a portfolio and then be installed at a later date. I was in the process of finishing up two graduate seminars: Spatial Narratives and Photography and the Novel. In Spatial Narratives I was making architectural drawings and beginning to experiment with making drawings with text and incorporated language. For my final project in Photography and the Novel I rendered my first drawing of a microscript by Robert Walser. This drawing led to a whole body of work.

I have admired the enigmatic Swiss writer Robert Walser for many

years. I had previously done a cyanotype print of Walser lying dead in the snow on Christmas Day and knew that I would again at some point bring him back into my work. In the early 1900's, after some relative success as a published writer, Robert Walser was experiencing writer's cramp. For him this was two-fold, he had writer's block and his hands were no longer capable of producing the elegant longhand script with which he wrote all of his early works of prose. His career was in a slump, and he was not at this point producing much writing at all. From this state of near defeat, Walser began writing with what he secretly called his "pencil method;" which entailed sketching out his stories in a micro-graphic German shorthand. This was a way to outline a story without his hand cramping up and also a way to relieve his writer's block. Walser hadn't shared this process with many colleagues or friends, so when the 526 fragments of paper with an undecipherable micro-script were being examined, they were first thought to be asemic, meaning without semantic content. These miniature manuscripts were finally deciphered, translated, and published (although some of them in fact, were published in Walser's lifetime). Quickly these fragments garnered attention, not only for the enigmatic prose that Walser is known for, but for the intriguing beauty of the fragments themselves, which are often compared to, and have been shown alongside, Emily Dickinson's envelope poems. These tiny manuscripts are written on various fragments of printed matter such as tear away calendar pages, newspaper clippings, advertisements, trolley tickets, business cards, postcards, book pages and covers, and envelopes. These fragments are usually rectilinear, cut with scissors, and have some printed text, stamp, or illustration on one side. Walser's microscript appears on one or both sides of the fragment.

MAKING:

I wondered what I could do with these microscripts? How could I, or how should I draw them? How could I do these enigmatic archival

fragments justice? I decided to project images of the microscripts onto large sheets of paper and draw them at a larger scale. I acquired a stack of 30" x 44" drawing paper, 9b graphite crayons, a graphite crayon sharpener, a set of colored pencils, and a digital projector. I already had high quality images of these fragments; I just needed to photograph those and project them. My first MFA year had come to a close, there was a Stay-At-Home Order in the state of Michigan, and it was then that I immersed myself in these Walser drawings.

I was able to relocate to Columbus, Ohio, for the summer and these drawings kept my research and creative practice alive during these first months of the pandemic. I worked from drawing to drawing and was reading every story I drew as a microscript, and reading about Walser in between. I worked on both sides of the paper, taping up the large sheet of paper, I'd project the image and draw on one side. Then, I would flip the paper and draw on the other side. I was using a thick graphite crayon for the microscript itself, so that I could simply write it rather than draw each character. It was complicated to master a German shorthand script I do not understand, capturing all the flourishes and gradients of natural handwriting. The script itself is closer aesthetically to Arabic than English, or German for that matter; I basically learned the aesthetics of an alphabet for a strange language I may never know (although I'd like to). I've always found cryptic languages such as Braille or shorthand quite interesting, so this project was a way to pursue many of my interests. The drawings blur the line between drawing and sculpture, especially because most of them are double-sided, and secondly because some of them were torn or cut to match the original archival objects. (see Fig. 29)

SPATIAL NARRATIVE:

In The Pencil Zone: Drawings of Robert Walser's Microscripts, the viewer enters into a room which has a number of large drawings on the

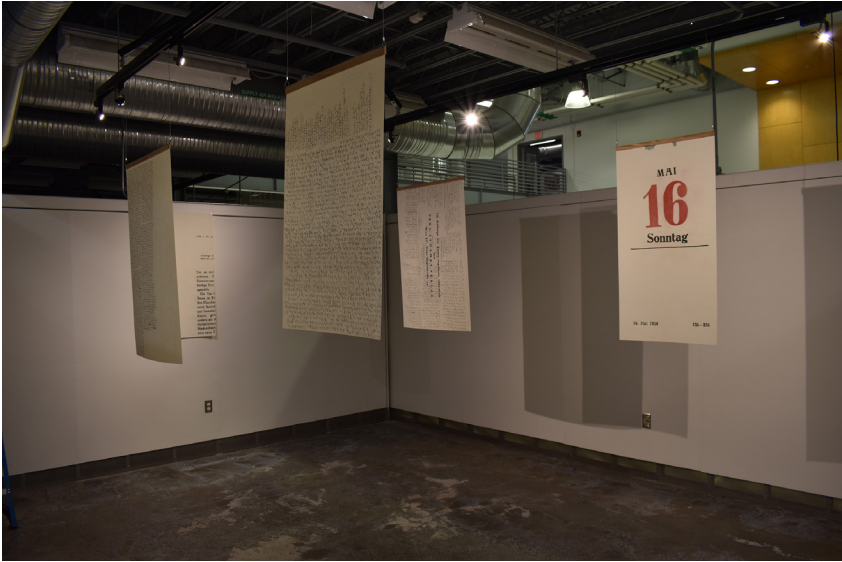


Figure 29. The Pencil Zone: Drawings of Robert Walser's Microscripts, Nathan Byrne, 2021.

wall and double-sided drawings hung like banners in the central area of the space. The double-sided drawings are suspended from ultra-thin braided steel wire and minimal wood frames, which clasp the tops of the drawings. The only drawing with color of the entire suite depicts a German-language tear away calendar page and has a vibrant red '16' illustrated in its upper half, along with other German script communicating the month, year, day, and so forth. The backside of this banner-like drawing has an enigmatic script which seems to be scribed in some sort of shorthand or esoteric language. All the drawings, except a single wall hung drawing, are covered or partially covered in this strange script drawn with graphite. The erasures and lines crossing out script and typescript make these marks seem to be some kind of musical score, outsider mark making, or simply not of this world. Some of the drawings have the "writing" in between or surrounding the drawn typeface or longhand. While walking in this installation one feels as though they are walking in a world of text. It is as if these banner-like notes have been hung out to dry in the sun, a laundry of language, and we as viewers have taken a strange detour through a backyard of

dream.

Reflection on The Pencil Zone: Drawings of Robert Walser's Micro-scripts:

This suite of drawings is important to my work on many levels. I needed to regroup and find a way to work in a pandemic, and this body of work allowed me to do that. I had been wanting to bring my devout interest in language into my work and was also able to do that with this project. Over the summer I also decided to base my MFA Thesis work on the drawing of another artist, and what I had uncovered while making these Walser drawings was instrumental in committing to that as well. I found that a deep inquiry into the work of another artist is actually fertile ground for introspection. Part of my interest in Walser's mark making, which reaches its epiphany in his microscripts, is the fact that he created a system to heal himself, and to continue to make work in this new way. It took great humility for someone who, in his youth, could elegantly pen an entire novel in a matter of weeks, to once again pick up a stubby pencil, and like a schoolboy sketch out his stories. Walser's mind and body were deteriorating, and this was the only way this last body of prose could have survived, and they just happen to also be exquisitely beautiful objects unto themselves. It is with this same spirit, this fervor to make, that I too took up my own stubby pencil and drew his microscripts. I needed to become devout to a body of work and had a shimmer of belief that these drawings would somehow lead me along the path to the creative work I came to this program to make.

Signal, 2020.

AN END IS NEAR

ENDING IN SITE

HOLLOW BE OUR END¹⁷³

– Gordon Matta-Clark

INTUITIVE RESEARCH:

School was due to resume in the Fall 2020, and I had been away in Columbus, Ohio, for six months as I waited out the pandemic. I was fully immersed in the Robert Walser drawings and researching theoretical texts for the spatial work which I was gearing for once I was able to regain access to the studio spaces. The moment I returned to the studio, I was preparing for a critique that was just a week away. I had an entire series of drawings that I was excited to show, but I had this lingering notion that there was another work that I could show during the same critique. I wanted to make a sculptural work that could speak to societal feelings about the pandemic and the state the world was in. I was also emotional about having lost access to my studio space which had been a sanctuary for me for most of my first year, and was harboring fear and anxiety that I'd possibly be losing it again. The intuitive research for this work arose from the turmoil of losing a place to make my work, the dislocation and cultural lag of returning to campus after a long hiatus, the stress and strain of the heightened political tumult, and of course the pandemic.

MAKING:

I repurposed the CNC milled plywood cabinets from my initial MFA project *Threshold*; however, I was using them in a much different way. They stacked vertically to the height of nine feet, and the milled slots would now also be oriented vertically rather than horizontal. Inside of each stacked section, an amber emergency flashing light flashed S.O.S. in Morse code. The lights flash out of sync, yet at certain moments in their cycle they unify. I installed this work in a project/critique room all by itself to communicate isolation and futility. This work, by being out of sync, perhaps speaks of our inability to work together societally; while the polyrhythms of light make the work strangely hypnotic. (see Fig. 30)

SPATIAL NARRATIVE:

In *Signal*, the viewer enters the space and finds an enigmatic minimalist tower standing isolated in the empty room. Intermittent flashes of amber-colored light emit through the vertical slots of the tower's four tiers. These chambers of the tower seem completely vacuous except for these oddly paced transmissions of light. The light flashes seem to be signaling S.O.S. in Morse code, which was difficult to decipher because the light patterns are all "speaking over each other" creating a serene dissonance. The viewer sees six wide slots on the backside of the sculpture when viewing from the front of the piece. Yet, when one walks over to the backside of the work, they notice that there are 35 slots milled into the backside of each tier—it's a mirage. While on this side of *Signal*, one can also see the slotted flashes of light projecting onto the back wall in odd rhythm. One expects the tower to be warm when near it because it feigns the glow of an electric heater. Instead,



Figure 30. *Signal*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: Ben Winans.

there is no warmth where the mind wills there to be, and no score to accompany the syncopated dance of light. This work, like a fugue in classical music, is deceiving in its undulations, leaving the viewer mesmerized and somewhat stranded.

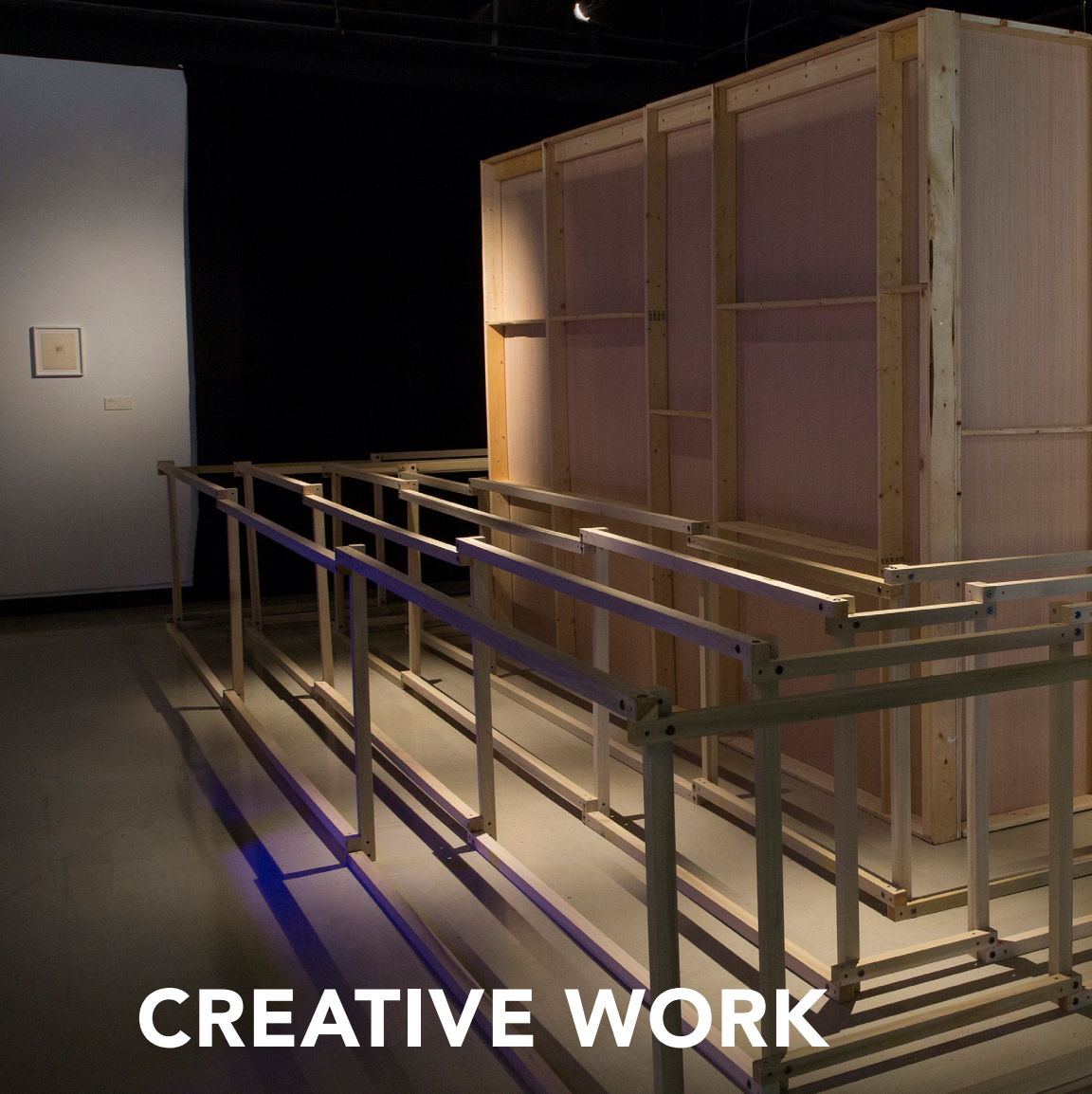
Reflection on Signal:

This work was meant to confront and potentially baffle the viewer. It is a hypnotic cry, a signal of distress emitting from a Donald Judd-like sculpture. And what does beauty and grace mean when the world is in turmoil? I was thinking about how to cry, how to show distress, or how to reveal a collective fear which has welled up in us all. I was interested in confounding those who couldn't experience this work for what it was. *Signal*, like most of my work, is an open read. The viewer is placed in a position where they can receive the signal, or they can shake their head and walk away. This work was made for those who are able to receive the signal.

METHODOLOGICAL CONCLUSION

In two years of research and creative practice in this MFA program I have learned much about what it means to organize one's work in a methodological cycle. As I frame my work within this Three-Phase Narrative and reflect upon my work one project at a time, it is clear that each work has led into the next. The shifts and readjustments that have been made have all maintained the path to my MFA Thesis Exhibition. I find joy in the wherewithal and tenacity my cohort and I have shown, as we pushed forward through great adversity. This methodological journey that I have chosen to make is not for everyone. This is because it is suited to my sensibilities and the way that I approach my research and practice. My methodology has proved to be a useful way for me to reflect on my previous work, and as a way to frame and pres-

ent these projects in a cohesive manner. I have made a concerted effort to present the reader with an accurate account of my intuition driven methodological process, which at times can seem rudderless.



CREATIVE WORK

Equally Empty, 2021



Believers in emptiness are incurable.¹⁷⁴

–Nāgārjuna

I can now delve deeply into each main element of *Equally Empty*, my Thesis Exhibition, which includes the labyrinth, inner sanctum, the *Equally Empty* artist book, untitled by Dean Smith, and the *Equally Empty* album. Following this I will do the same for the two sculptures in *The Dream is Not All Dream*, which is the sub-exhibition. These works are titled: *MAKING THE RIGHT CUT* and *From the Pencil Zone*. I am singling out each of the main elements only to better take in the work as a whole. By doing this I am reminded by this statement made by the architect and writer Keith Mitnick: "Objects require limits in order to be distinguished from the field of reciprocal relations in which they exist, but the limits we impose upon them are a function of our perception rather than a property of their thingness."¹⁷⁵ I will keep this insight in mind as I move through this project in a piecemeal fashion.

The Labyrinth

The space in the center of the labyrinth is referred to as the inner sanctum. If this is the heart of the installation, then the labyrinth is the sternum and rib cage that protects the heart. The inner sanctum is indebted to the labyrinth and in return the labyrinth is indebted to the inner sanctum. In fact, every part of this layered installation is vital for the role it plays in the field of reciprocal relations that Keith Mitnick mentions above. The progenitor of each of these two core elements is a small graphite drawing of a labyrinth, untitled by the artist Dean Smith. The proportions and design of *Equally Empty* are based on this drawing, which has momentarily assumed the role of proposal drawing for this work. The labyrinth gracefully articulates the space of the installation, and maps out the intricate lines of the drawing. Its framework catches the nuanced lighting of the dimly lit space while also throwing a second drawing of shadow upon the floor. (see Fig. 31)

The viewer is able to follow the top horizontal pieces of the labyrinth as it rises and falls in an optical rhythm which allows the eye to dance

upon the top tier of the construction. This very same rhythm is duplicated except inversely by the lower tier of the framework, meaning that when the top tier drops the bottom tier rises. This creates a more balanced movement, a contraction and expansion takes place; as if the wood is breathing. The method of construction of the labyrinth is indebted to the grid beam technology created and evolved by two brothers from Willits California: Phil and Richard Jergenson. I have streamlined their grid beam by only pre-drilling the holes for the connection points, which makes for a tidy and minimal aesthetic. The joints where this precisely milled poplar lumber merge also has a pleasing pattern. The connection points and elegant hardware fastening the lumber all line up creating a radiating uniformity and balance which can be felt by the viewer.

The passages of the labyrinth are narrow, only 13 inches wide. For one to walk a path of the labyrinth they must be somewhat slender and lithe; some can only walk the labyrinth crabwise. Each of the four paths of this labyrinth are unicursal, meaning that they all are singular paths which lead to a destination. However, they all end in a dead-end, just before they reach the point where the path began. What is interesting for me as the artist, is the decision the viewer is presented with. Shall one walk a path with difficulty only to be goaded to reach a dead-end just before the point where their path began? Or should they circumnavigate the entire labyrinth with ease and engage with it mentally (or spiritually) and sensorially without needing to be within the space? I made it and did not feel the need to walk each path to the end. (see Fig. 32)

The labyrinth functions spatially and perceptually on so many levels that I couldn't find it within myself to lessen the experience of the labyrinth by walking it with great difficulty. I am able to fully immerse myself in the work by ambulating around it or pondering the lines and shadows of its elegant framework from outside of the labyrinth passages. There are perceptual shifts as you move around in the space,



Figure 31. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

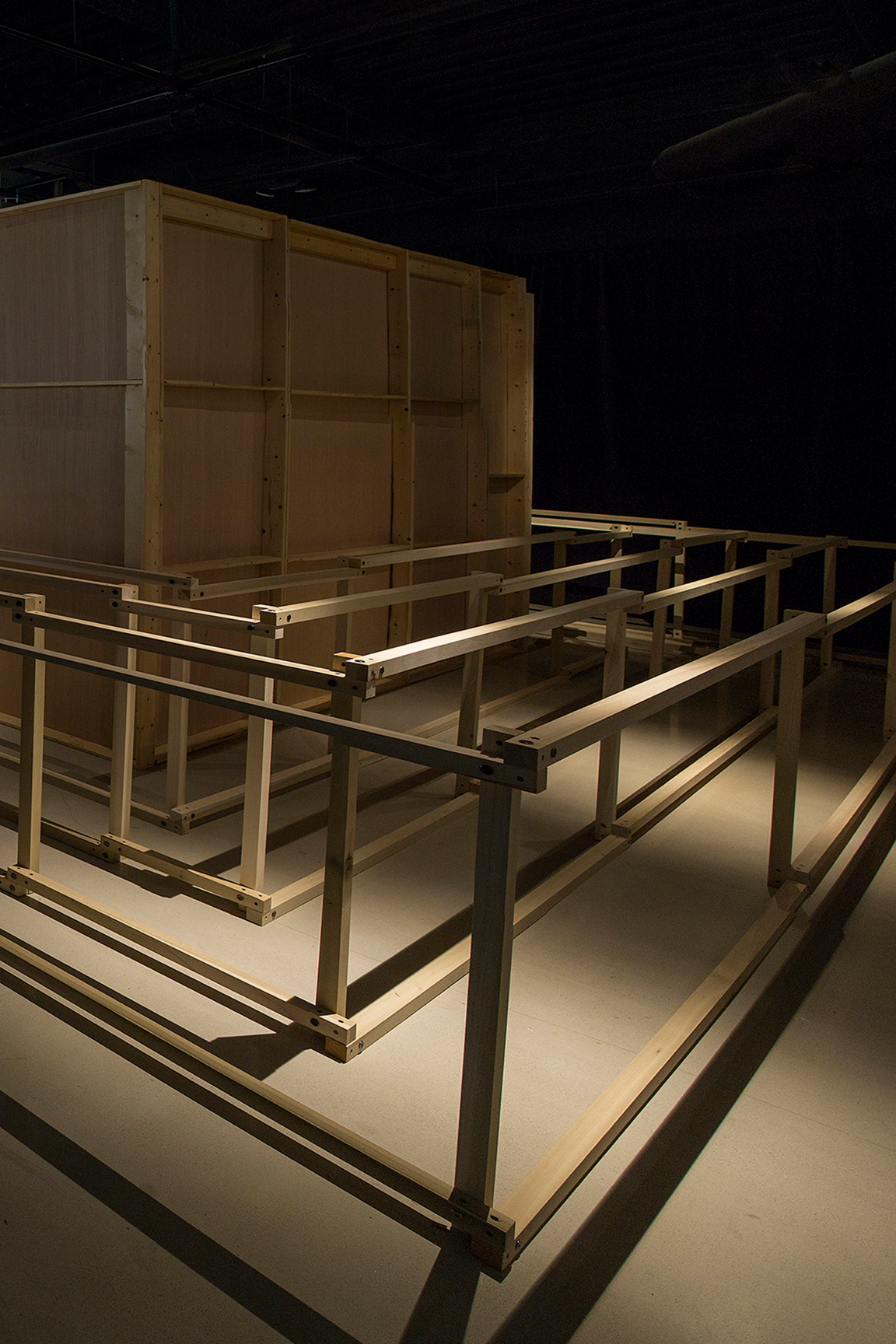




Figure 32. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

and from seemingly every vantage point the viewer is offered a unique visual composition. The lighting upon the labyrinth's multitude of parts, and the patterns of light and shadow which in turn are thrown onto the floor, bring this work to another plane.

By choosing the labyrinth as a design, I realize that I am taking on an ancient archetypal form which has a mythic and historical lineage. I am interested in the paradox of the labyrinth, how it can embody the inner experience of spiritual transformation, and yet can also be an allegory for chaos and disorientation. I feel that for this particular project the labyrinth is able to function in both manners. The labyrinth creates a sacred space and also cradles and provides an entrance to the inner sanctum. It brings a contemplative aspect to the installation which the viewer is able to engage with while meditatively circumnavigating the work. They may also perceive the graceful balance and playful lines and shadow, which heighten their embodied experience from outside of the structure. Within the labyrinth one may feel constrained and misled by the paths of this labyrinth which are quite narrow and also challenging

to traverse, especially to reach a less than ideal destination where they are then forced to turn around and walk back to their point of departure. (see Fig. 33)

The labyrinth offers the viewer a decision as to how they would like to engage with it as structure. This decision itself embodies the paradox of the labyrinth, and of perception itself. Whether the viewer chooses to walk the labyrinth or enter into it in some other fashion, the presence of the labyrinth in the space is essential to the work. Its relationship to the inner sanctum and to the graphite drawing by Dean Smith speaks to the plethora of roles this mythic form is playing in the field of reciprocal relations. I'll end with the words of Hermann Kern, a foremost scholar of the labyrinth, as he poetically comments on the potential of self-discovery within a labyrinth:



Figure 33. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

In a labyrinth, one does not lose oneself,

In a labyrinth, one finds oneself,

In a labyrinth, one does not encounter the Minotaur

In a labyrinth, one encounters oneself^{A76}

Inner Sanctum

The inner sanctum is the architectural structure which lies at the center of the labyrinth. The structure is modular and consists of interconnected panels, similar to wood panels used for painting. The inner sanctum is boxy and slightly asymmetrical, and at first glance it comes across as a large-scale crate with an opening into a mysterious interior. I meant for the exterior to be understated, and in aesthetic dialogue with the natural wood color and framed construction of the labyrinthine passages which surround and protect it. Yet, when the viewer crosses the threshold of the inner sanctum, the experience abruptly shifts and becomes enigmatic. (see Fig. 34)

The interior is a dimly lit and cave-like sanctuary, where the viewer's perception of their environment may become imbued with a sense of serenity. When just a couple steps within the space the viewer is able to bathe in the ethereal sound which transmits from above. Along the back wall, a series of folded steel panels corral the sound to the center of the space. This ambient sound subtly shifts and resonates while the viewer becomes entranced by the light falling on the flares of the panels.

Abstracted and patinated reflections also dance across the edges and folds of this strange topography on the back wall. The perimeter of the floor is demarcated by uniform rows of hundreds of short columns

through which light emits. This perimeter of light is broken up by the rows of columns and seems somehow to follow one as they move about the space. The warm light radiates as embers in a fire would, and this lends a sense of meditateness and calm to the inner sanctum. The viewer is invited to palpably feel the space, it is as if they were in a cavern and could only kinesthetically sense the presence of the walls of the cave, which are obscured by the darkness. The sculptural interior enlivens a spatial sensibility, which allows for an awareness of self to be awakened in the viewer. The sound and light and space culminate, and an aura becomes present. This inner sanctum is the heart of this work; it is where a mindfulness and a sense of spaciousness may be palpably experienced. (see Fig. 35)



Figure 34. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.



Figure 35. Equally Empty (detail of inner sanctum) Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: Nick Beardslee.

The idea of emptiness for me is a non-material event, it is a transformative sense of space and awareness of self. This state of being is attainable when one is grounded in the present and empty even for a moment of that which is outside of the embodied perception of their environment as well as their inner experience. There is no correct way to perceive the inner sanctum or the work as a whole. I, as the artist, am merely cultivating and guiding what in the end is a totally subjective experience. I recall a conversation that I had with the artist Dean Smith, while I was early on in the planning stages. I asked him what he

envisioned the inner sanctum to be like. He replied that it shouldn't be the root answer, yet it could ask the root question. He then stated that in his drawing it is both a plenum and a void. I knew then that I must make such a space, and that the labyrinth could be built around that. (see Fig. 36)

Equally Empty, Artist Book

The *Equally Empty* artist book sits upon a podium within the installation, which contains Dean Smith's prose poem *The Tunnel* and Gordon Matta Clark's poem *Short Term Eternity*. The majority of the text within this 48-page book is riso printed with white ink on white paper, and is meant to be perused with the aid of ultraviolet light. The experience of reading text under UV light is mesmerizing and makes for a much more immersive process than the usual reading of text. In this installation the viewer most likely would be walking out of the inner sanctum and then they would take a right and be walking along the front of the labyrinth



Figure 36. Equally Empty (detail of inner sanctum interior) Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

structure toward the wall text for the exhibition; the UV light would draw them toward the space where the podium and artist book are situated. The luminescence from the podium lamp creates an effulgent violet glow that makes everything in the space radiate as if the violet-colored light were emanating from within the objects and nearby surfaces. It is this otherworldly glow which pulls one into the space of the book. (see Fig. 37)

The Tunnel by Dean Smith was written in relation to his ongoing labyrinth drawing series, and up until now he hadn't known what to do with this strange and beautiful prose poem. When I asked him to contribute to the *Equally Empty* artist book, he immediately knew that this was where this piece could exist. *SHORT TERM ETERNITY* was my contribution of text for the book, the text is by Gordon Matta-Clark and is transcribed and arranged by me into a poem. These texts dovetail exquisitely in their shared pursuit of spatiality and inner experience through prose, exploring through language what I am also exploring through embodied spatial experience in the installation.



Figure 37. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

The book itself is in a saddle stitched zine-like format. The front cover illustration is an architectural plan drawing of the *Equally Empty* installation within the gallery space where the book is being viewed. The rear cover illustration is an architectural drawing as well, depicting the centerlines for the labyrinth walls and correlating measurements. While working on this project these architectural drawings captivated me, and I found that the book cover was an interesting site for them to exist. The front cover also includes measurements and architectural symbols. Within the space of one of the labyrinth pathways the title for the book, *Equally Empty*, subtly appears as if it too were part of the architectural plan. As the viewer peruses the book, they will notice that the majority of the text, which is riso printed in white ink, is violet and the text as well as the pages themselves seem to be emitting light. If the viewer lifts the book from the podium, they will be able to see the engraving of the cover of the book, which is also 5" x 8" and provides a demarcated space for this book to rest. It only seemed right to make a space for a book about space. (see Fig. 38)

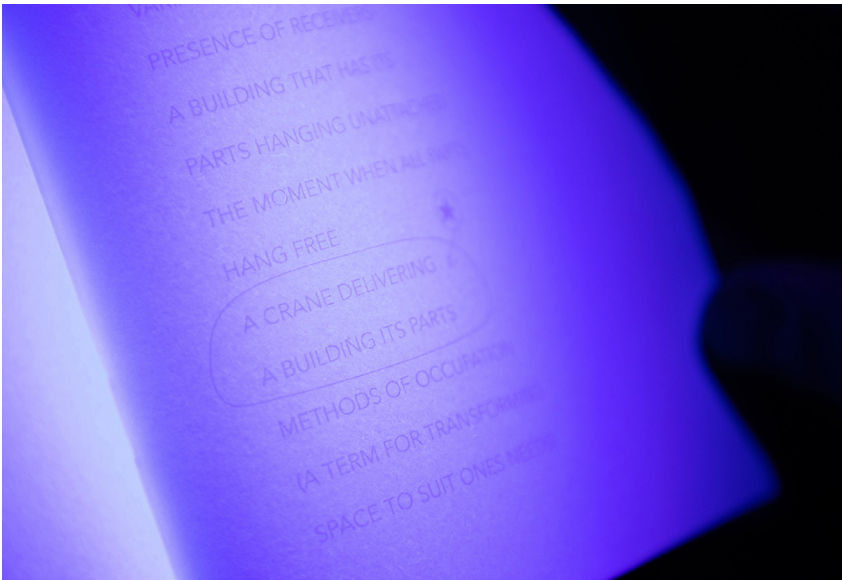


Figure 38. Detail of *Equally Empty* artist book, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: Nick Beardslee.

The phantasmagoric narrative of *The Tunnel* by Dean Smith is rendered so aptly by this luminescent activation of the text. This prose poem is a hallucinatory experience of walking within a tunnel which seems to defy any semblance of static spatial coherence. The reader engages with increasingly unsettling perceptions of space while the prose goads the reader to question even their own state of mind which seems to blur with this experience within *The Tunnel*. The second piece in the book, *SHORT TERM ETERNITY* is an epic poem and a vision quest, which though language explores the boundaries of space and of self. Gordon Matta-Clark was a poet and an autodidact yet was also dyslexic and many times pushed past the limits imposed by language.

The poem is comprised entirely of Gordon Matta-Clark's ideas, musings, and aphorisms which he scribed on index cards as a habitual evening ritual to settle his mind. While combing through these cards I found them powerfully resonant and poetic. I could feel the artist's presence living in these far-flung aphorisms. I was inspired one day to begin transcribing them from his handwriting and to arrange them into a poem.

I enlisted a print designer to help develop the manuscript, which included the elaborate and complicated typography which was needed to capture the whimsy and folly of Matta-Clark's hand. The result was this 37-page poem titled *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*. The text keeps all his misspellings and has captured his hand drawn marks such as circled words, cross outs, underlining, calligrams, and unbridled punctuation. We did this as well as could be done through expanded typography—which makes for a lively read beneath UV light in an immersive installation. The *SHORT TERM ETERNITY* text, made up of his index card notes, had only been shared with close friends prior to his death. It only seems right that a reader of these personal thoughts, dreams, and ideations must first decode them in an intimate Ultraviolet light ritual. I found his index card practice to be a rich and deeply personal plat-

form for his spatial inquiry and poetry. The writings which exist in these index card notes are, and always have been poetry. I was just fortunate enough to have the idea to arrange and combine this interstitial form of writing to make the epic poem *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*.

***untitled*, 2019, by Dean Smith**

If the viewer is looking at the *Equally Empty* artist book within the installation they must simply turn to their right to see the graphite drawing *untitled* by Dean Smith. In the artist's own words he creates drawings which are: "a slow, rich meditation on an idea as it unfolds to its conclusion."¹⁷⁷ Works from this labyrinth series are drawn on found paper which Dean has acquired in his profession as a rare book archivist, and I feel that this plays an important role in these drawings. The paper comes with a history of its own, some of this paper dates back decades and some dates back centuries. The paper then is more like a site where the drawing takes place, and the marks themselves are suited to the site. (see Fig. 39)



Figure 39. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

In this drawing, the union between the paper and the graphite are as light as a breath. The marks upon the page show no sign of being applied with a pencil at all. They seem to have been finely printed, or to have materialized rather than having even been applied to the paper. The drawing is small, just 6" x 8 ½",. I asked Dean about the scale in regard to this series of drawings, and he replied that they needed to be small because he was working on these found pieces of paper. He added that he wasn't interested in combining sheets, so he was working within the allotted space. When I saw this drawing, I had this odd desire to build it, for me the space of this drawing could be a space you could walk into. (see Fig. 40)

I had a conversation with Dean and asked if I could momentarily allow his work to assume the role of proposal drawing for my installation. He agreed to my proposition, and shortly after I developed digital models of his drawing with a colleague. We then made building plans, I eventually did a full-scale mockup of the installation, and it eventually became the inner sanctum and labyrinth in *Equally Empty*. Dean Smith himself refers to his art practice as "a ceaseless human impulse to render the invisible visible."¹⁷⁸ If we use this logic, then I am essentially making the visible invisible *enterable*.

As the viewer encounters this beautifully framed graphite drawing, they must notice some resemblance to the space they are indeed standing within. The drawing is in the rear of the space and beckons one to come forth even from across the room. The intuitive viewer realizes that this small and intricate graphite drawing is indeed mapping the installation and the installation is mapping the drawing. This framed drawing has all the telltale signs of cartography as well. When standing in front of this work the world itself just seems to fall away and you are left pondering if this drawing has always been here because timelessness seems to abound and there is nothing else outside of this moment.

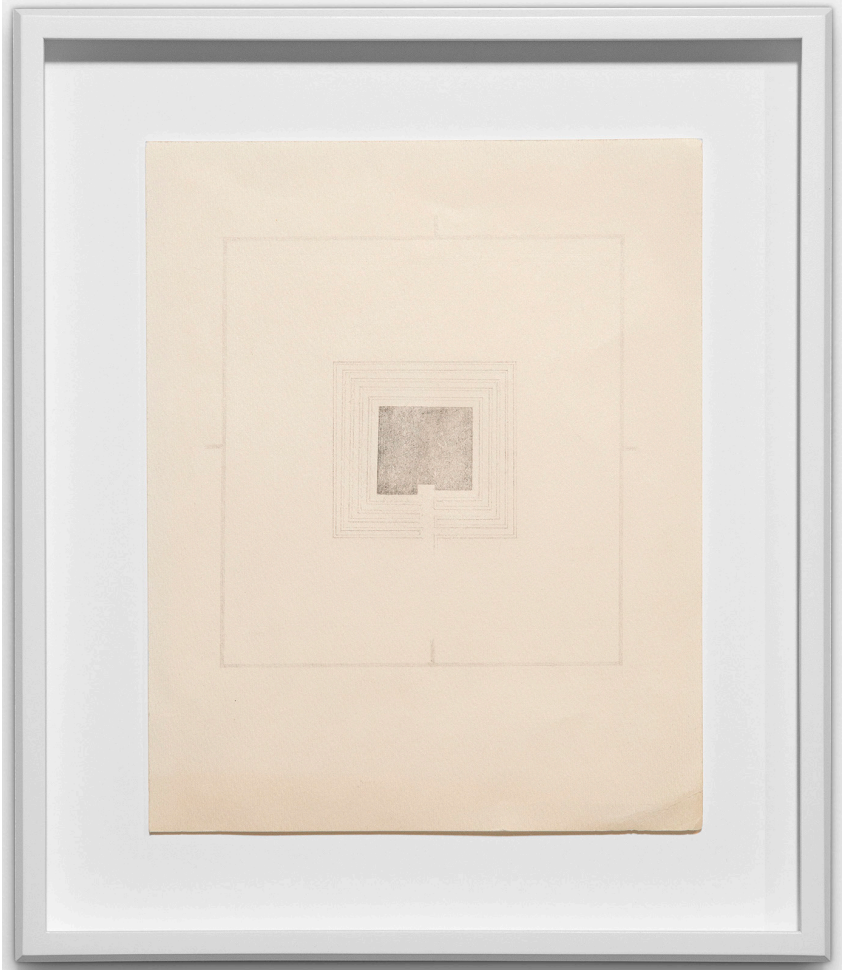


Figure 40. *untitled*, Dean Smith, 2019. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

Equally Empty, Album

The *Equally Empty* artist book and album were released simultaneously with the exhibition. This first run of the artist book was printed in an edition of 150, and anyone who purchases or is given the book receives a miniature UV lantern and a free download code for the *Equally Empty* album on Bandcamp. The album has the same cover as the book; they are sister projects and meant to accompany one another. The album consists of two audio tracks, each equally important to the project. The first track, *Equally Empty* is the longform ambient soundscape which is the audio one hears while within the installation. Distant Reader, aka Emmerich Anklam, is a sonic artist based in Berkeley California who I have regularly collaborated with since 2017. This title track is composed to be a meditative and ethereal score for the embodied experience within this space. As the only audio track which exists in the space of exhibition and within the space of the album, it creates a direct bridge between the two platforms.

When the viewer is within the inner sanctum the sweet spot for the listening experience is in the center of the space. There is a parabolic directional speaker above which focuses the sound waves toward the center of what becomes a sonic mandala. This ambient score resonates in a cyclical way. The composition contains an ever present sound similar to wind, it is as if the music of the spheres is being slowly released from a valve. Deeper intonations resound intermittently, as if there is thunder rumbling from far flung canyons. Heavenly organ calls seem to pass over the soundscape like slow moving comets which reverberate and fade into the darkness. This ethereal sound is the sound of passing, as if it were a whale song which awakens the waters before dying in distant seas. (see Fig. 41)

The second audio track is titled *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*, which is just under 28 minutes in duration. This recording captures my reading of *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*, which is the Gordon Matta-Clark text that I

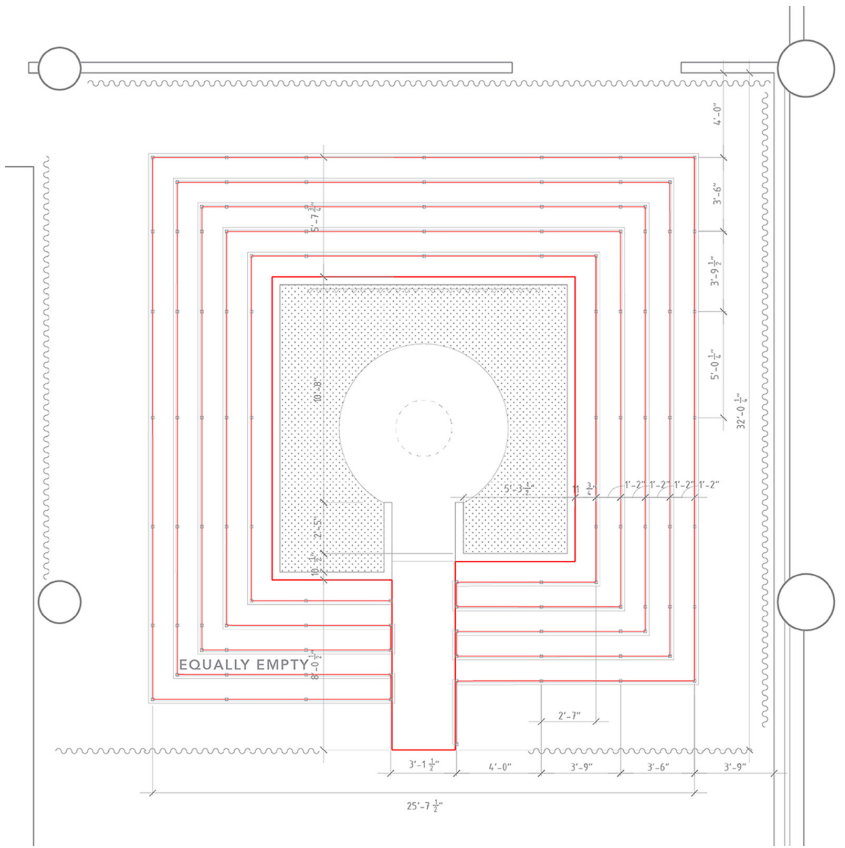


Figure 41. *Equally Empty* album cover, 2021. (Illustration by Sydney Farris and Makenzie O'Connor).

transcribed and arranged into an epic poem. The reading of the poem is sonically surrounded by a montage of atmospheric field recordings by Emmerich. When I began piecing together the Matta-Clark text into a poem, I was immediately aware of the incessant musicality of the language and felt this could be heightened through a sonic composition. For this track Emmerich and I had a series of conversations about Matta-Clark's writing, and I shared the manuscript of the poem. I was able to record a measured and steady reading of the work, which goes on and on, and the listener might question if it would in fact ever end. This was exactly what I wanted from the piece, as it is indeed a short-term eternity. Emmerich expertly surrounded my reading with an audio collage of immersive field recordings, which makes it seem as if the reading was given near a stream while within a grove of trees with the sounds of wind and bells in the distance. The resonant lyricality of my posthumous collaboration with Matta-Clark comes through, and his voice is heard through my own while Emmerich Anklam's meditative bed of sound enhances the reading. (see Fig. 42)



Figure 42. Equally Empty, detail of directional speaker, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

MAKING THE RIGHT CUT, 2021

In *MAKING THE RIGHT CUT*, I sculpturally engage with a particular Gordon Matta-Clark index card note. This is the penultimate work I will discuss from my Thesis Exhibition. It resides in the sub-exhibition known as *The Dream is Not All Dream*. Frances Richard describes the importance (for Matta-Clark) of this particular index card note which informed my sculpture:

Handwritten in his architect's block capitals, an index card sums up his intentions as a sculptor of void space, considering the power of a gesture neither random nor perfect. The note was useful to him, and he recopied it several times: MAKING THE RIGHT CUT SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE SUPPORTS AND COLLAPSE.¹⁷⁹

Frances Richards points out that this index card statement by Matta-Clark sums up his intentions as a “sculptor of void space.” I wasn’t thinking of this specific summation when I made this, yet I was having similar insights about this particular index card functioning as an artist statement and also a political statement. The statement is literally instructions for taking down a structure, which is revolutionary in itself. (see Fig. 43)

This sculpture is a meditation on Matta-Clark’s cut drawing process as well as his index card note process. In his cut drawings he would cut into stacks of paper with a router or saw as a new way of drawing. He would do this to try out new building cuts as a sort of sketch for a future work, some of these were to repeat a previous building cut in the stack of paper, while some were meant only to exist as a cut drawing. The cut drawings have been shown at various venues and I was intrigued by these pieces when shown in wood cases directly on the floor, with some of these cases exposing one or more edges of the paper. *MAKING THE RIGHT CUT* resembles these cut drawing floor sculptures of Matta-Clark while also reproducing Matta-Clark’s handwriting and

the proportions of the original index card on which he wrote this statement, except at a larger scale. I am essentially making a cut drawing of the artist's index card statement and housing the paper stack in a wood case with an open front edge, as he was known to do. (see Fig. 44)

As the viewer approaches this work, they are able to lean over and peer into the absent space of the handwriting all the way to the bottom of the wood case. The front edge reveals the edge of the paper, which is 475 sheets thick, this edge reads as if it were the edge of a massive tome. The work is sizable enough that one is able to sense the sculptural presence, impacting the viewer's physical sense of orientation in relation to the work. A colleague of mine pointed out the multiplicity in this work as well, which is a theme to much of the work I am presenting in the exhibition. In this case the viewer is able to see the obsessive repetition of the sheets of paper at the edge and also from inside the absences created by the voids of language. One is able to perhaps imagine this phrase being repeated as many times as it is embodied by the paper. The weight of language, of an artist's statement, can thus be palpably sensed in terms of its physicality and density. (see Fig. 45)

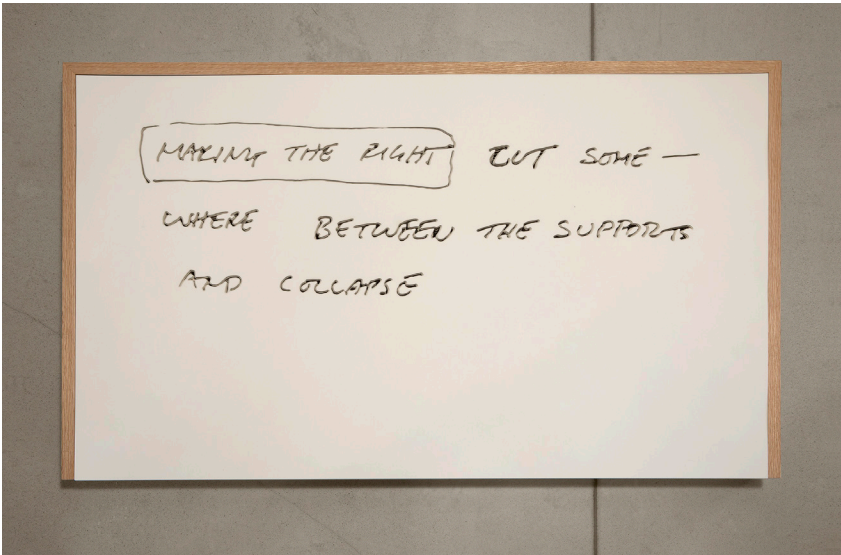


Figure 43. MAKING THE RIGHT CUT, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.



Figure 44. Gordon Matta-Clark Works: 1970-1978 at David Zwirner Gallery, 2018.



Figure 45. MAKING THE RIGHT CUT, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

From the Pencil Zone, 2021

Across the floor from *MAKING THE RIGHT CUT* is another floor sculpture which is titled, *From the Pencil Zone*. This sculpture reflects on the connection between language, drawing, and sculpture. As the viewer approaches this floorwork they notice that this piece is also an object made from stacked pieces. In this case it is a number of mirrored rectangular panes of glass which are stacked to create a rectangular cuboid which is 4 inches in height and width and 4 feet long. The top of this sculptural object is a majestic golden-hued mirror surface. Fifteen, pointed hexagonal graphite segments are standing vertically in a pattern which makes it seem that they are attempting to social distance. These graphite pieces are short and only pointed on one end, yet they appear to be twice as long, pointed on both sides and sinking into the mirrored surface. The work sits a few inches from a section of wall, which has black vinyl moulding at its base; this creates an odd harmony and duplicity with the sides of *From the Pencil Zone*, which are also black and a similar height. A double reflection of this work is projected upon the wall which has ghost images of the graphite pieces joining the existing ones in this illusory throw of light. (see Fig. 46)

The summer before my thesis year, I was working steadily on a series of drawings which were interpretations of the enigmatic Swiss writer Robert Walser's microscripts. I was using these stubby hexagonal graphite crayons and colored pencils to render these exquisite miniature manuscripts on drawing paper at a larger scale. As the drawings piled up, I was also saving the remnant graphite stubs which could no longer fit within the holder or sharpener that I was using. I continued to save these graphite stubs and brought them back with me to school when I returned to campus for the fall semester. I showed *The Pencil Zone: Drawings of Robert Walser's Microscripts* for my first critique upon my return, and then began to channel all my energy toward preparing for my Thesis Exhibition. One fortuitous morning I placed one of the graphite stubs upon a stack of mirrored glass I had on my studio

floor, and I was suddenly in awe. I quickly placed the other pieces upon the glass and this peculiar union between implements of drawing and sculpture came to be. *From the Pencil Zone* is a direct reference to the series of Robert Walser drawings from whence the graphite stubs came, and this is the connection of the material, and the work itself, to language. (see Fig. 47)

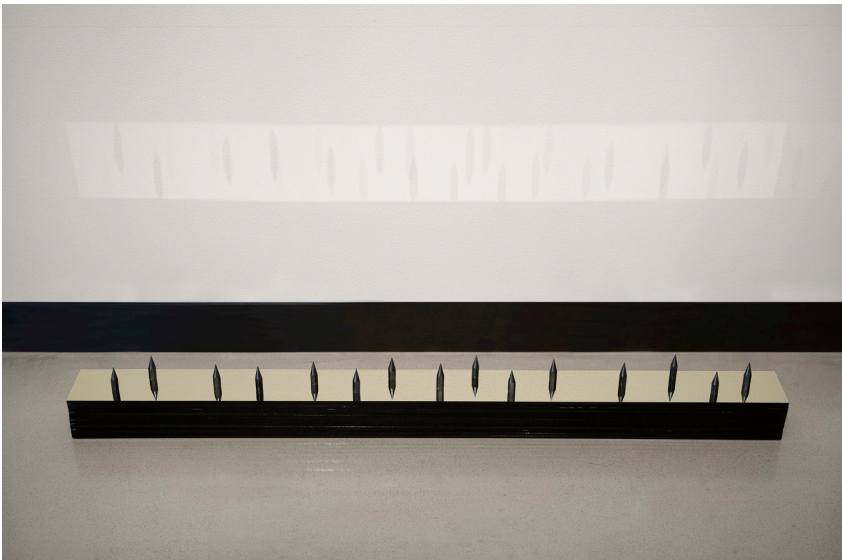


Figure 46. *From the Pencil Zone*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.



Figure 47. *From the Pencil Zone*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.



CONCLUSION

There does not exist anything that is not dependently originated.
Therefore, there does not exist anything that is not empty.¹⁶⁰

-Nāgārjuna



In *Equally Empty* the viewer is able to immerse themselves sensorially and find solace in space and in spaciousness. By designing an installation which is informed by my research of phenomenological perception and my research in eastern philosophy and contemplative practice, I was able to interweave insights from both fields into this work. My readings in phenomenology and phenomenal art inform my sense of spatial experience, while my meditation practice and immersion in teachings of eastern philosophy, namely Buddhism, led to my

interest in spaciousness. It is serendipitous that many of the readings and teachings from both branches of philosophy are interested in both spatial experience and awareness of self. By creating a work meant for embodied perception, I am able to guide the viewer's reading of the space while still offering them the opportunity for their own non-vicarious experience. I am also able to reflect on my own direct perception of the work, which allows for an expanded understanding of the project. (see Fig. 48)

The inner sanctum of *Equally Empty* is at the center of the labyrinth and is where the viewer may receive the transmission of sound and light within what I consider a space of spaciousness. As one enters into the interior, the sensorial atmosphere changes and the viewer finds themselves to be proprioceptively enlivened, meditative, and also mindfully engaged with their inner experience. The world outside the space seems to fall away, even just for a moment, if one allows themselves to be present in the moment. The viewer is also able to meditatively circumnavigate the entire labyrinth structure, while imagining themselves physically in the space. However, the experience of



Figure 48. *Equally Empty*, Nathan Byrne, 2021. Photo credit: PD Rearick.

walking the four paths which do not lead to the inner sanctum have the potential of being disquieting rather than meditative. The paths themselves are quite narrow to the point that some may need to walk the paths crabwise, if they are able to be entered at all. These confining pathways eventually allow their walker to nearly reach the point where they began the passage, before goading them to retrace their steps back to the beginning. The confusion and disorientation the walker of these paths may experience embodies the other end of the spectrum created by this labyrinthine paradox, as opposed to the mindfulness of a walking meditation.

The paradoxicality of the labyrinth intrigued me because it embodies two spatial categories which interest me most, transformative space and emotive or psychologically charged space. Each of these spaces are particularly interesting in the realm of immersive installation. I thought that this would be an opportunity for the labyrinth structure to enact both extremes of the spectrum of spatial experience based on the viewer's chosen interaction. This labyrinth then becomes an allegory for the reoccurring difficulties and unexpected windfalls of human experience. My labyrinth also references a graphite drawing of a labyrinth, untitled by the artist Dean Smith. The labyrinth I created materializes the imagined space of this very real drawing. By engaging with the trope of the labyrinth as a researcher and artist, I was able to uncover new insights into this mythic form.

Dean Smith's graphite drawing will never lose its status as an intricate and exquisite drawing; it was an artwork before my project and will be an artwork afterward. It has simply taken on a corollary role as a proposal drawing for my immersive installation, in a sense it was moonlighting as a proposal drawing. The thing that separates this from a more common process, is how the drawing came to take on the role of proposal drawing. I found this drawing in the world and arranged for it to be the catalyst for the space I was making. Normally the artist draws the proposal themselves or contracts someone to render the

drawing. One of my roles as an artist was matchmaker, I found a drawing and united the drawing with the possibility of a space. After this union had been made, and Dean Smith's untitled was comfortable in its position as proposal drawing, I could then work on transposing this imagined space of his labyrinth into an immersive installation.

The drawing was a catalyst for the installation itself, and iterations of this image found their way into every component of this multi-layered project. I have mentioned many of the latent possibilities which emerged in this project by transgressing this typically imposed boundary between one artist's drawing and another artist's space. One of the most important aspects of this unconventional collaboration between Dean Smith and I, or between untitled and *Equally Empty*, is the friendship that has burgeoned between myself and the artist Dean Smith, which possibly never would have happened if I would have drawn my own proposal drawing. Asking if I could build his drawing created a bond which reaches beyond drawing paper and a pencil.

Much of my research and creative work has been centered on making space for other artists in my work. If I examine the creative work I made for my MFA Thesis Exhibition there are many layers of collaboration, and the hand of my collaborators show up in many places, such as the typography and print design of Makenzie O'Connor showing up in the *Equally Empty* artist book. The cover illustrations for the *Equally Empty* book and album are by Sydney Farris, which are based on architectural drawings for the design and building of the installation, which she rendered as well.

The most essential aspects of my creative work in the exhibition were guided by other artists. I have already discussed at length the importance of the artist Dean Smith, so I will now mostly discuss two artists I made space for in my creative work, Emmerich Anklam and Gordon Matta-Clark. From the very beginning stages of planning *Equally Empty*, I was sure of just two things: one was that I would be constructing a labyrinth, and the second aspect of my project was that there would

be an area in the center of the labyrinth where one could hear sound composed by Emmerich Anklam. The inner sanctum of the labyrinth allowed me to make space for Emmerich's score, and Emmerich in turn designed the sound to be confluent with my space. In addition to the ethereal ambient sound within the installation, an *Equally Empty* album was released which again made space for Emmerich Anklam's sound work. The album consists of two audio tracks, the first was the title track which was the installation's score, the second track allowed for my voice to enter the space of the album as I read the poem *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*. My reading was sonically surrounded by a tapestry of field recordings made by Emmerich. In this recording I made space for Gordon Matta-Clark by reading his words, and in turn Emmerich Anklam made space for my voice.

The artist Gordon Matta-Clark informs a lot of my thinking about space and language. While researching him I became intrigued by two of his processes which tend to be overshadowed by the notorious building cuts. These are his cut drawings and his index cards; I saw these processes as portals into his thinking. In *MAKING THE RIGHT CUT*, I was able to channel both of these processes into a sculptural object into a piece which philosophically and aesthetically resembles Matta-Clark's cut drawings. I feel that I am making space for the statement scribed on this index card by cutting his handwritten words into the paper. The text is made legible by the absence created by cutting into the stack of paper. So, in a sense the language of the artist is communicated by using a language the artist was quite fluent in, removal and void. I am allowing this particular index card to resurface within my own exhibition in a way which reimagines his inquiries into space.

By making space for the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, I am allowing his work and his voice to continue to resonate through my own work and my own voice. It is in the *Equally Empty* artist book and album that I continue to channel the language from his index card archive. As

I mentioned in the Creative Work section, I transcribed and arranged text from the Matta-Clark index card archive into an epic poem titled *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*. When transcribing these writings, it was important for me to preserve the misspellings, cross outs, and irregular grammar, which pervaded the text of the index cards. I was compelled to retain the aphoristic, poetic, and prophetic voice of Matta-Clark in its rawest form. The concept for this book is mine but the entire literary content, the cover images, the printing, and print design, all of these aspects of the work were done by other artists. The key role which I played in the making of the book was to make space for the other artists.

By making space for the work of others within my own work I am making a document. It is a record to some extent of how I am processing the world. The works which I present are evidence of this interest which begins in my interior yet ventures outside of myself to engage with ideas in the world. My intuitive research leads me many times to things like literature, images, objects, and experiences which are outside of me. When I engage with works made by another artist it is from a place grounded in generosity rather than scarcity. I am guided by empathy and compassion as I imagine my work in relation to the work of others. By making space for an artist's work within my own, I am dreaming through their work, and creating a platform for a record of this dream to exist. I will close with the following excerpt from the poem *SHORT TERM ETERNITY*, the text is by Gordon Matta-Clark, which I transcribed and arranged:

~~THE SPACE~~ THE AIR

~~FALLS~~ BEHIND YOU AS

YOU MOVE —

STEPPING IN AS MANY

DIRECTIONS AT ONCE

OPENING UP VIEW TO THE

UNVISIBLE —

DRAWING THROUGH THE WHOLE

TO SUMMERIZE ITS PARTS ·

THE SUBTOTAL OF ALL THE PARTS EQUALS THE
WHOLE

THE FIRST AND LAST

STEPS OF ANYWHERE

RECURRENT DREAM

SPACES

MENTAL AREAS EXISTING JUST

BEYOND THE FAMILIAR

A KNOWN SPACE IS VISUALIZED

THEN ADDED TO OR SUBTRACTED

FROM ·

A BUILDING WITH A VIEW
THROUGH AND AROUND PASSING
TO COMPLETE A SPACE
NOT BUILDING BUT RESTURING
CHANGING THE DIRECTIONS OF A LOAD.
WORKING WITH AN EYE BETWEEN
THE SURFACES
RETHINKING A BUILDING AWAKENING
NEW STRESSSES...ALL PARTS WORKS A PART
A PART WORKS ALL PARTS

NOT TAKING A PART TO SUIT THE WHOLE

TRANSPOSING A STRUCTURE
BY DRAWING —————THROUGH IT—

MAKING THE RIGHT

 CUT SOME—
WHERE BETWEEN THE SUPPORTS
AND COLLAPSE

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