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material assemblies

moving matters in urban milieus



# material assemblies

## moving matters in urban milieus

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Massey University  
Wellington, New Zealand

Tomas Richards  
2015



# abstract

Weaving both out from and into creative practice, this writing discusses three key works in a thesis project engages commonplace materiality through expanded modes of sculpture. It readdresses the city as a habitat, discovering urban fragments and spaces as sculptural forms. This project involves Installations and performative interventions working with, complicating, and expanding notions of 'site'. Through slow processes attentive to the minutiae of common spaces the project shapes new encounters with affecting 'things' often overlooked or undervalued. The emerging works navigate Wellington's Dominion Museum basement, storage corners of a contemporary Dunedin gallery and nearby bookbinder's building, and an intersection of paths in Wellington's city centre. Through a series of subtle gestures, this practice explores empathies and conversations with object-things which populate and punctuate shared common milieus. Situated within shifting contemporary landscapes, what unfolds through this thesis project is a fragmentation and diffusion of notions of site, belonging, and engagements with an animate sense of materiality.

# acknowledgements

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# introduction

This writing traces engagements and movements through three urban spaces. It presents a process driven practice informed by expanded modes of sculpture which draw together neglected urban objects and spaces as materials for new bodies of work. The role of this exegesis is to assemble dispersed works as key moments within a broader creative project – gathering their stories and mapping their significance in unfolding relationships of embodied presence in the city as a habitat. These processes engage nations of site and sculpture which are not fixed but instead move and morph as I work with them. As another mode of creative practice, my writing weaves both out from and into these three key works, with this document forming a new space to extend these works, to reflect on their routes and deviations. First and foremost, this project attends to the character and subtle idiosyncrasies of things as they are found, rather than the fabrication of new objects. It negotiates areas between installation, performative situations and spatial interventions which border on the imperceptible, opening possibilities of awareness toward aspects of our surroundings which might otherwise go unnoticed. This practice proposes that a sense of materiality can be discovered which is rich, diverse and affecting,<sup>1</sup> embodying what political and ecological theorist Jane Bennett calls “thing-Power”, “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> O’Sullivan, “THE AESTHETICS OF AFFECT.”

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 6.

Through my practice I have observed that my surroundings at any given time have significant impacts on how I feel, think, move and create. My creative practice has run concurrently with periods in which I have resided in city environments – first in Dunedin and currently in Wellington. Before this, from the ages of five to seventeen I lived in the country, in an un-gated, collectively run commune near Nelson. At the property next door I attended an alternative-education primary school. In both places sustainable ecology, equality, freedom of choice and democratic negotiations were fundamental and governing values. It is only recently that I am realising just how relevant and influential the settings of these early years have been. As quiet catalysts they inform the particular ethos, interests and methods which drive my creative processes.

In this sense, many of the concerns which inform my practice have inherent ethical, ecological and political dimensions. These are influenced further by a combination writers such as Jane Bennett, anthropologist Tim Ingold, and philosopher and sociologist of science Bruno Latour. A key insight of these and related contemporary writers (such as those in ‘Object Oriented Ontology’) is a critical blurring of imagined partitions of the world “into two domains, one that is inanimate and has no agency, and one which is animated and concentrates all the agencies.”<sup>3</sup> Their dismantling of dichotomies and divisive hierarchies between things human and non-human, organic and inorganic extends a childhood enchantment found in forest alcoves and half buried relics to affective experiences in city habitats. I feel it is important to explore slow processes, to re-experience our contemporary settings with fresh eyes and ears and to foster a live sense of presence and discovery on a subtle and personal scale.

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<sup>3</sup> Latour, “Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene,” 14.

Differing from ontological searches for a transcendent ‘beingness’ beyond physical things, my practice endeavours to take “seemingly superficial aspects of the everyday seriously.”<sup>4</sup> Bringing the philosophies of Bennett, Ingold and Latour together means revisiting tangible assemblages and things themselves as ‘beings’,<sup>5</sup> as “...*social* bodies, in the sense that each is, by its very nature as a body, continuously affecting and being affected by other[s].”<sup>6</sup> With space and materiality as central concerns, it’s appropriate that I turn back to embodied and intuitive first-hand experiences of things to articulate my position relating to key art precedents, and ultimately to ensure my practice remains at the forefront of my research. In what Bennett identifies as an emergent ‘material turn’ across art and philosophy, my practice explores combinations, synapses and uncertainties between the palpable and convivial.<sup>7</sup> Whereas art making is traditionally about bringing new objects into the world, I work to develop more attentive relationships with immediate materialities of things which surround us already. Bringing mindful and democratic practices from my upbringing into creative work, my sculptural approaches counter conventions of manipulation and production of objects in art, instead taking a speculative approach, testing ways of negotiating with things as equals, subjects which co-inhabit everyday environments with us.

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<sup>4</sup> Wark cites Henri Lefebvre in Wark, *The Beach beneath the Street*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> For OOO proponent Levi Bryant discusses this is locatable in the Heideggerian ‘ontic’. Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman, *The Speculative Turn*, 261–278.

<sup>6</sup> In this section Bennett discusses seventeenth century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza’s concept of ‘conative bodies’. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Gratton, “Vibrant Matters.”

The following writing is arranged in three main sections. Each section discusses key material and ideas from a trio of creative works from 2015. Although unfolding chronologically, these works sit alongside each other with equal importance, forming a collective thesis set rather than a singular progression of a linear culminating project.

- The first section revisits *White Noise and Snares*, an immersive spatial installation involving the found space and contents of a basement storeroom in Wellington's ex-National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum building. Experiences and thoughts explored through this work and section include a dynamic understanding of 'hoarding', drawing relationships to dwelling and/or inhabiting space.
- The second section revisits reciprocal exchanges of found objects between two Dunedin city buildings in *Traversing Particles*. As a complication of distinct sites, the carrying and trading of stored material performed a metaphorical and material discourse between Dunedin's Blue Oyster Gallery and a largely disused upper floor of a historic printing press.
- The third section and work *Dixon Situations* was catalysed by a mid-renovation interior on Wellington's Dixon Street. This explores more dispersed and contingent negotiations through a wider zone in the inner city, further complicating notions of site and sculpture. It calls participants to negotiate through and around public 'non-places' which fall between the gaps of our usual motions, such as alleys and goods access lanes.

Rather than signalling complete departures from one another, each work experiments and hones different modes of working and thinking which have emerged through practice-led research over the past two years. This document draws from a range of sources for writing, including documented thoughts, events and discussions; marking the affects of my work on those who experience it, and their insights which influence my evolving processes and thought. In a sense the locations of my work could be almost any place humans inhabit, as my practices reside in the everyday and art simultaneously. These investigations grow from an open curiosity to form temporary frames of focus to develop more meaningful engagements with the commonplace corners of our environments.

# *White Noise and Snares*

## and unsettling closeness

White Noise and Snares (April-May 2015)

Spoken poem; found interior, audio, room contents (easels, ply-board, tables, student ex-project material, drawers, laminate shelving, warming cabinet, looms, et al.), projected slideshow, live Sony PCM-D50 Recorder and headphones, people; room 10A12 (temporary university storage room, ex-computer lab, ex-National Art Gallery storage), Dominion Museum Building a.k.a. Block 10 Wellington University College of Creative Arts, Pukeahu, Wellington city



30.04.2015

*The group meet at the west face of the Museum.  
We are led through an underground hallway to a secure door.  
Outside the space Tom reads;*

*Found cluttered, a crowd  
Jostling for air  
And to speak  
All white noise  
With snares  
Bunched, stacks, huddled  
A tumble, all elbows  
An under-thing of whispered echoes  
From hemmed hunchedness  
Keen ear to ruffles  
To peer, weave, traverse  
Reshuffle, loose knots  
Matters meet, traipse, retrace, repeat  
To converse  
Balancings laden, on edges, nested  
A liminal milieu*

*Tom lets us into the space.  
Tables, chairs, dismantled walls, and design paraphernalia fill the  
room almost completely. Shuffling noises of people inspecting the  
space, no speaking. Sound track of rustling noises comes on from  
hidden speakers somewhere in the clutter. Maybe it's been on the  
whole time.*

*No talking for at least ten minutes.*

*A photo montage of the objects within the space arranged in  
different configurations is projected onto a desk leaning against a  
wall. A metal tin is knocked to the floor. Actual sound of pins  
dropping.*

*A table is balanced teetering across another table turned on its  
side. Rust in buckets, empty canisters.*

*The table gently rocks when bumped.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup>Fairweather, Tom's Crit.



# enter the hoard

*White Noise and Snares* was situated in an unsteady refuge, inhabiting a durational space which opened up personal relationships with accumulating objects and combined contexts of this location which had empathically disorienting effects on me. This work was influenced by a number of approaches in sculpture and could be described in terms of installation, as a room-sized assisted readymade, an intervention, a situation, and a gathering. It unfolded in a temporary storeroom (ex-classroom, ex-museum and national art gallery storage) in the basement, area a few corridors down from our studios.

Etymologically, 'hoarding', links both to notions of personal value and of home – from Old Saxon *hord* "treasure, hidden or inmost place", and Old High German *hort* "store" or "refuge."<sup>9</sup> After the weeks where skip-fulls of university furniture were being extracted, likely destined for landfill, I found a calmness and shelter in passages beneath the 'Old Museum Block' (where many of the College of Creative Arts former spaces were evacuated to house "*The Great War Exhibition*"<sup>10</sup>) and many displaced objects of the institution had been treasured and stockpiled. I used the basement corridors as a curious detour, weaving between temporary scaffolding poles supporting the ceiling; checking on its changing arrangement every few days. The passage had an uncanniness to it, and the storeroom's clutter was a challenge to my largely minimal practice. Although spacious, the room was brimming with things.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Hoard"; Harper, "Hoard."

<sup>10</sup> "The Great War Exhibition | Wellington, New Zealand."

<sup>11</sup> I felt like an intruder. Over the first few days I visited I stood in silence, in the blackness, listening. Slowly making contact with the surfaces of various

My mother's mother was born in Germany. We lived next door to her for the first five years of my life. Often she spoke of the post-war wastes and wastelands of her upbringing and of her difficulty feeling at home in this foreign county. Her valuing and safe-keeping of various everyday objects which others would freely discard is something which continues to influence my life and practices. Some may consider her a hoarder. In her lecture *Powers of the Hoard* Jane Bennett argues for a fresh understanding of domestic hoarding, not as pathological condition but a case of heightened empathy and awareness toward the life of 'inanimate' things.<sup>14</sup> Hoarding, commonly regarded as the extreme tendencies to collect and hold on to ephemera most would discard, has been noted by others, such as Gillian Whiteley, as reactive and idiosyncratic to modern practices of mass production and in-built obsolescence.<sup>15</sup> Rather than reducing these activities to adverse symptomatic impulsion, Bennett makes a strong case for the capabilities hoarding expresses — where subjects are particularly attuned to the affective agency and “non-linguistic communicability” expressed by non-human things.<sup>16</sup> As a collector of things, of stones, paper ephemera, construction detritus and other remnants usually designated as 'waste', I have found Bennet's proposition significant in understanding my interests and actions in positive terms. For example, through *White Noise and Snares* I grappled with and opened up to a sensitivity to surroundings rather than dismissing these practices as detrimental or the materials involved as inconsequential.

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objects I was sensitised to their distinct texture and timbre and recorded the amplified rustles. Only days after my first visit could I find ease in reshuffling objects, one by one.

<sup>14</sup>Bennett, *Powers of the Hoard, Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter*.

<sup>15</sup>Whiteley, *Junk*.

<sup>16</sup>Bennett, *Powers of the Hoard, Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter*.

My understanding of materiality has been reaffirmed and extended by Bennet's broader philosophies of matter, where the physical stuff which makes up our surroundings is noticed as lively and affecting. Bennet's New Materialist perspective resists prevailing post-Kantian thought which rests on detachments between human and the non-human world, drawing instead from voices such as Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze and Latour to reconsider ontological relationships between humans and 'things'.<sup>17</sup> Terms such as 'material,' 'matter' or 'object' are usually defined as mute and inert resources or tools for human users, quite dissimilar to the 'thing' — autonomous, ubiquitous, yet not easy to pin down.<sup>18</sup> However, throughout this thesis project matter, material, object and other terms (whether at the scale of dust, a person, a building, a street etc.) have become less severable from understandings of the complex 'thing'. From its proto-Germanic roots, a 'thing', or *ding*, involves a socio-political gathering, a democracy of voices. It has locational and durational dimensions; it is at once a matter of concern and an unfolding event — noun and verb, tangible and indistinct.<sup>19</sup> *White Noise and Snares* evoked a 'thingness' of the hoard, as a material and social assemblage.

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<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

<sup>18</sup>Brown, "Thing Theory."

<sup>19</sup>Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik – An Introduction to Making Things Public"; Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries," 1807.

30.04.2015

*Visitor<sub>13</sub> – “The room, it’s still with me. I thought about my own sense of incredible pain over all our waste. The care that you have taken. Questions of aliveness. The beeping of the door.”*

*Visitor<sub>6</sub> – “We contributed [to the work] as things got bumped and elbowed, jostled.*

*Visitor<sub>16</sub> – “Tensions. Categorizing objects. Fragmented things. The vibrant matter and the sadness of fallen objects”*

*Tomas, TR - “The distinction is blurred. A porous boundary between a suite of objects or fragments of a chaotic whole. How do you find a subtle but effective voice in a crowd that is screaming? [These things seem to speak all at once].”*

*Visitor<sub>16</sub> – “Connotations of brokenness and wholeness.”*

*TR - “It became an exercise in belonging or not belonging. It took me a long time to feel like I was allowed to be there. When I went to the space for the first couple of days I sat there and didn't touch anything. I didn't even turn the lights on. Slowly I felt the space allowed me to be there.”*

*Visitor<sub>10</sub> – “The space seemed in conflict. Tables balance, struggling to find balance...”*

*TR - “There’s presence in the textures, I’m interested in traces of history. Where the museum sits used to be a high hill and Maori pa. Then it was an army barracks, a prison, a national gallery, a uni, and now... [I feel] objects have a life force. [The space] has a crampedness of objects similar to [my childhood home]. Here there’s an anxious inhabitation. There’s a power in objects that I can feel when I come here.*

*Visitor<sub>25</sub> - “There’s nesting, and repetition.”*

*TR – “When I walk through the city, and in this space, I begin noticing and collecting repeating motifs, images, stacking. Something that repeats through an area, or the entire city. Gathering a lexicon. Repeating of stacks, a repeating of bundles. For familiarity.”*

*Visitor<sub>16</sub> - “...the Deleuzian Refrain.”<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup>Fairweather, Tom’s Crit.

*White Noise and Snares* inhabited an unstable space brimming with objects, sometimes in disorder, sometimes in an unrecognisable order. These collections defied pervasive modes of visual presentation and apprehension, extending beyond the retinal to engage other senses, other ways of experiencing. Densely populated and precarious, the situation encouraged haptic, spatial, aural and durational dimensions. Figures such as philosopher Henri Bergson and architect Juhani Pallasmaa note how touch intrinsically involves a closeness, an awareness tied in with intimacy and direct relation to material reality, distinct from the necessarily distancing faculty of vision privileged in the modern era.<sup>21</sup> Owing to its perceptual chaos and conventionally non-aesthetic forms, *White Noise and Snares* presented a challenge to determining how we as inhabitants ought to behave in a space. Balancing objects were accidentally knocked over, some visitors avoided touching anything (whether in respect of the space or respecting codes of conduct around art) while others picked up objects freely; for example stacking found study notes into a house of cards.

Through this project I asked myself where else in art collections of ordinary manufactured objects have been presented as artworks. Duchamp and his readymades seem key here, as unlike countless artists through history who have manipulated found materials, Duchamp proposed new ways of appreciating ordinary objects largely in their found state.<sup>22</sup> There are however distinct differences between his works and *White Noise and Snares*, which involved not a single object but a shifting multiplicity of an entire room and its contents. Contrasting Duchamp's intentions of the readymade to

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<sup>21</sup>Bergson, *Creative Evolution*; Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*.

<sup>22</sup> Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades.'"

privilege the conceptual, *White Noise and Snares* readdressed the phenomenological in encountering found things. While I am sympathetic to Duchamp's insight that "the creative act is not performed by the artist alone", I see this collective contribution as extending to things nonhuman as well.<sup>23</sup> Nonhuman entities, even seemingly inanimate objects, are far from passive tools. Rather 'things' make all art uneasy collaborations with the material world.<sup>24</sup> I view the 'gap' Duchamp speaks of, between our intentions and real world outcomes, as not merely a discontinuity between human thought and practical skill. Instead, *White Noise and Snares* presents this 'gap' as the complex real space of the everyday, occupied and overflowing with lively, morphing, and unpredictable things. Rather than to transmute what might be seen as 'inert' matter, the dynamic of art I am interested in works to shift our perspectives and behaviour to better sense the utterances of able-matter around (and within) us all along.<sup>25</sup>

While inhabiting the cluttered basement that was home to *White Noise and Snares*, this investigation called to mind the architectural effects in artworks such as Gregor Schneider's *Haus u r* (2001), Mike Nelson's *Coral Reef* (1999), and *Nothing will come of nothing, speak again* (2012) by lesser known Dutch/Belgian artist Remco Roes. While heavily renovated, Schneider's disorienting interiors and Nelson's fabricated abandoned interior are similarly uncanny in their skewed mimicry of ordinary dishevelled corridors and corners we might find in real neglected buildings. Like Roes', on the other hand, my work also draws exclusively from the found contents of a storeroom. In this instance, however, my practice diverges from Roes' clean formalist compositions, Nelson's disquieting simulations and Schneider's

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<sup>23</sup> Duchamp, "The Creative Act," 1957; Duchamp, "The Creative Act," 1959.

<sup>24</sup> Morton, "Poisoned Ground," 50.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, *Powers of the Hoard, Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter*.

labyrinths – mine brings an assembly of human bodies to become mixed in with the disorderly corporeal masses. *White Noise and Snares* called on visitors to navigate, contact and experience at a slower pace this common space jumbled with local histories.

## from dwelling to inhabiting

As contemporary anthropologist Tim Ingold discusses, Heidegger's ontological concepts of being in the world revolve around the 'dwelling', involving a clearing out from within, carving out structure from chaos, a pocket for one to occupy.<sup>26</sup> The simple act of occupying in itself has impacts on an environment, with intrinsic socio-political dimensions: to occupy a space often demonstrates a disruption of the status quo, whether spectacular or subtle, intentional or not. Yet for Ingold living in and with local environments means not merely occupying a closed space of dwelling, but an inhabiting of the 'open world.'<sup>27</sup> Although altering or even accessing the storeroom's foreign domain of things seemed at first unsettling and abrasive, Ingold might argue that being with 'things' in the true sense of the word "is a 'going on', or better, a place where several goings on become entwined. To observe a thing is not to be locked out but to be invited in to the gathering."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries," 1797; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*.

<sup>27</sup> Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries," 1797.

<sup>28</sup> Ingold, "Bringing Things Back to Life," 4.



One evening at an opening a friend reaches into her pocket and hands me a lumpy thread of wool. She had picked up a tuft of the white fibres while experiencing *White Noise and Snares*, and held it in her pocket since. I imagine this loose bundle meeting her in that space with us, turning in her fingers, at home, or walking through town, mixing with oils and dust from her skin, from the city, and pocket lint, twisting and fusing into a wobbly line, a meandering path. Over the weeks these matters unfolded (or rather, folded together) haptically into felt threads, stretching in a slight, personal and pertinent way the perimeters of the work (as installation, as situation, as experience). This occurrence came to influence the conceptual framework of the works to follow. While the four walls of the storeroom trace an obvious frame in which to experience an assemblage in terms of art, the doorway and walls came to mark not abrupt limits but permeable membranes.<sup>29</sup> Moving beyond a single interior, the site of this work and subsequent investigations began to seep, both in from and out along corridors, out along the floor and nicked walls. And as demonstrated by the case of the wool fragment, through movements outside, in pockets and palms to other spaces and situations.

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<sup>29</sup> Ingold, *Being Alive*.

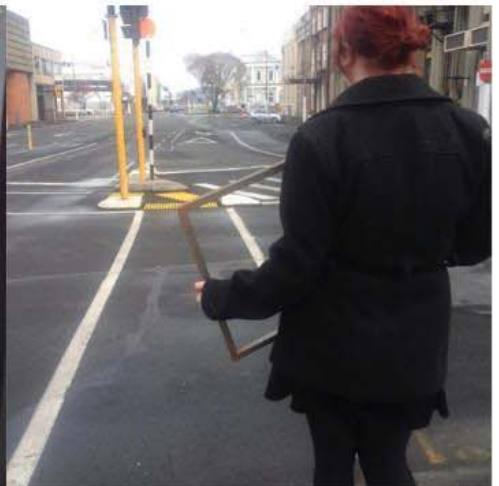
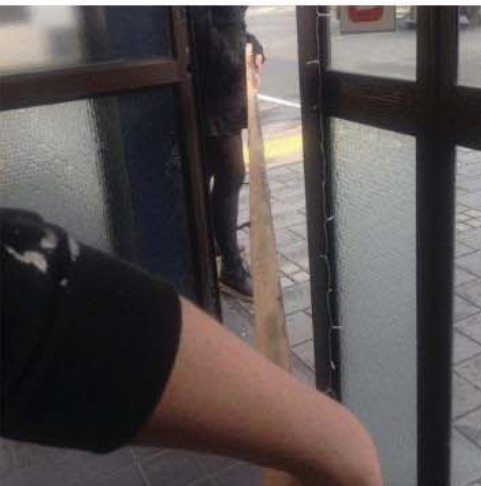
# *Traversing Particles*

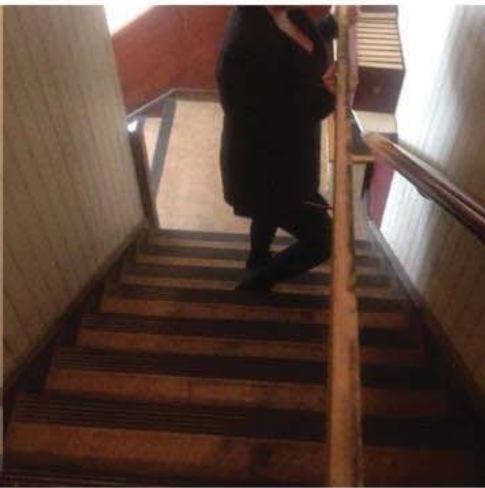
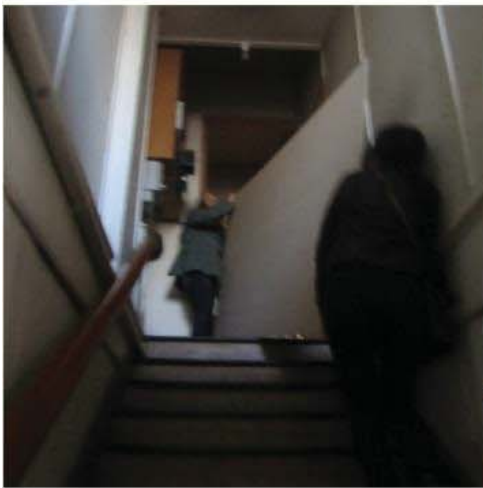
## and convivial distances

Traversing Particles (August 2015)

Floorboard and found storage objects in Blue Oyster Gallery 16 Dowling St and Dutybound Bookbinding 57 Crawford St, Dunedin city (Brick dust, MDF sheets, cinder block, pin-boards, window-glass shard, bathroom mirror, doweling, mug, lino, timber, skirting, iron frames, card tube, key box, foam, Letterpress block, rubber stamps, et al.) exchanged reciprocally by foot one by one to opposite building over course of a week; objects returned to initial location by B.O.G. director and volunteers

[www.blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/a-tragic-delusion/](http://www.blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/a-tragic-delusion/)





The first section of this year and exegesis involved tensions and explorations of closeness and interiority, shifting from claustrophobic occupation toward co-habiting in a world of vocal materiality. This section traces negotiations of distance in discursive and material exchanges between and through specific spaces.

*Traversing Particles* unfolded as a performative intervention in the Blue Oyster Gallery (“the B.O.G.”, Dunedin, New Zealand) group show *A Tragic Delusion*.<sup>30</sup> It involved exchanging found storage objects between two locations whose distance was navigated by foot. Over the period of a week I, and others, enacted a passage, a string of gestures between the two interior spaces at the edge of Dunedin City’s industrial zone. The first location was a clean contemporary gallery at 16 Dowling Street, a former printing shop, renovated in 2013<sup>32</sup>, the other was an expansive and time worn space upstairs from Dutybound, a bookbinders at 57 Crawford Street. It has raw, open rafters and curiously painted markings across the floor that mapped out previous workspaces. An assortment of letterpress paraphernalia stacked in a corner tells of its long history as an industrial printing press since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My friend Jake Fairweather became a crucial collaborator to *Traversing Practices*; he contributed recordings and a sound piece which emerged as a substantial element of this work, collaged from the rhythmic clinks and scrapes of various objects traversing the streets with us. On my final day I joined artist Adrian Hall in a performative live work, mopping then waxing a section of Dutybound’s upstairs floor over 3 hours, the audio laying a score and pace for improvised actions. Over the month this sound piece played quietly through the Crawford St space, retelling embodied movements between the two buildings while remaining temporal and ephemeral.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Blue Oyster Gallery, “A Tragic Delusion.”

<sup>32</sup> and many decades earlier the offices for the city’s harbour imports.

<sup>33</sup> Philip, “Mapping The Mirage.”

Visiting my aunty on the peninsula I noticed she, as an oral historian, is attuned to the unique voice and story of the individual. Carrying objects one by one was important to me, exploring their unique voices in metaphorical and physical ways through introducing them to different spaces and surfaces along the walks. The first object to be pulled and navigated down the street proved to be the most physically and empathically demanding. The tensions of this day remain with me still.

02.08.2015

*Sunday. I woke nervous. I hitched a ride in without trouble. Her daughter was at art school up north, and she was doing her PHD in yogic brother and sisterhood. She was welcome company. I voiced my uncertain excitement about the days to follow. She said it was "a subtle shifting of the field, a shifting of approach. Don't have to change everything, just be yourself."*

*Later Harvey cuts into the floorboards, chewing, reverberating ran up through my boots and shinbones. Through the air, burnt wood, dust and tar. Wrenching. Heart wrenching. Like pulling teeth. Screeching, filling my head. Harvey almost calls it quits when the board splits. I almost call it quits at every step, every bite. Finally he pries it free. He points out reassuringly that the tongue is cut off, but the groove is still there.*

*Traversing Particles* marked a personal return to the city where my practice began in earnest in 2009, where I worked through sculpture and into experimental combinations of impromptu performances in public spaces and immersive installation. Rosalind Krauss' *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* remains an implicit foundation to how I think and work.<sup>34</sup> *Traversing Particles* was informed by minimalist and site responsive heritages which explore embodied awareness between the viewer and qualities of spaces specific or generic. Figures in mind include Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, and particularly New Zealand's Pauline Rhodes. While inhabiting a yet more extended and complex field, my practice evolved as a less categorical engagement including both contexts of architecture and landscape rather than their negation. For me the performative and relational dimensions in iteratively carrying and trading stored objects are not reducible to or reserved for human agency either. As contemporary 'Realist' writers such as New Materialism theorist Karen Barad argue, material things are active agents in shaping and transforming the world — beyond passively 'being', they each affect their own becomings and that of others through encounters, through what Barad calls 'intra-actions'.<sup>35</sup> Rather than a performance for an audience, joining in activities of traversing the particles of each place meant to "participate...in the thing's thinging in a worlding world."<sup>36</sup> *Traversing Particles* was to become a journey of experimental uncertainty, alteration, relocation, traipsing, noise and quietness, collaboration, cohabitation and return. Bringing human bodies back into the equation, it enacted a mobilisation and discourse with matter. Holding things near and letting them go I began to allow a very private creative process into the view and hands of others.

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<sup>34</sup> Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."

<sup>35</sup> Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity."

<sup>36</sup> Ingold, "Bringing Things Back to Life," 4.

04.08.2015

*The timber is unwieldy, stretching lengthwise, balancing on the shoulder. It flexes and curves, dipping toward the sealed ground in front and behind. With each step it bounces and bounds, leaping up off my body as if to take flight. Despite its weight it puts a spring in each step, lifting me with it. Floorboard and I lean together and press the button to cross. We bend and manoeuvre our way through the Dutybound doors and up the stairs. Over the following days others join in, finding and carrying various things from their respective corners in the gallery and above the binders': MDF sheeting, old skirting boards, press stamps, dust et al. In the evenings Jake and I select our particles and traipse them across a soon familiar route. We draw them along walls as we walk, finding xylophones in roller doors and iron bar fences, speaking in a hush, recording the tunes as we go. In the dark we find a scratchy trailing rhythm. By day dodging traffic, an improvised logistics of 'moving stuff' from a. to b. with a note to take care, there are nails.*



## shore and puddle

On a research visit to the two spaces in June, I met David the Dutybound bookbinder. As one of the first built on reclaimed land in the late 1800s, the binders building was once in the middle of a thriving import and export industry, sitting along what has become Jetty Street. David recounts a story of exploring a neighbouring historic building with the owner: descending into the basement, then deeper yet into a pitch black level, finally stepping off a ladder to feel uneven ground underfoot, a subterranean shore below the city streets. This story painted an indiscernible yet enduring image of vitality and rupture.<sup>37</sup>

Before I travelled south, Chloe, the Blue Oyster Gallery Director sent out photos and a rough floor plan of the Crawford Street interior. A wobbly circle labelled “puddle of water” caught my attention. By the time I arrived it had dried out, leaving a stained filigree gradient reaching out across the chipboard flooring. In light of damaging flooding across Dunedin not two weeks earlier, these two minor narratives of an enduring shoreline and invading rain spoke subtly of forces of nature persistent in the city. For me these situations refute constructed divisions or hierarchy between ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ phenomena and evoke a fluidity of space where things seep in and out between delineated sites, complicating their edges, their territories.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> I later realised this bears an uncanny resemblance to the slogan from French political demonstrations of May '68 — influenced, if not written by (in)famous urban explorers of the Situationist International — “Sous les pavés, la plage!” often translated as “*Beneath the pavement—the beach!*”, Shepard and Smithsimon, *The Beach Beneath the Streets*, 3.

<sup>38</sup>Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 314–316.



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<sup>40</sup> "Effect Of The Heavy Rains In The Dowling Street Cutting."

# architexture

Finding gouges in both the Crawford St building's stairway walls and the Blue Oyster Gallery's floors influenced my thoughts throughout *Traversing Particles*. Observing these subtle material idiosyncrasies, I read these marks and dents as direct yet ambiguous evidence for moments where human and non-human things collide and entangle their histories; affecting each other's ontology, their identity in the world. I keep returning to Tim Ingold's *Being Alive*, encountering this passage just days after visiting the Dutybound space;

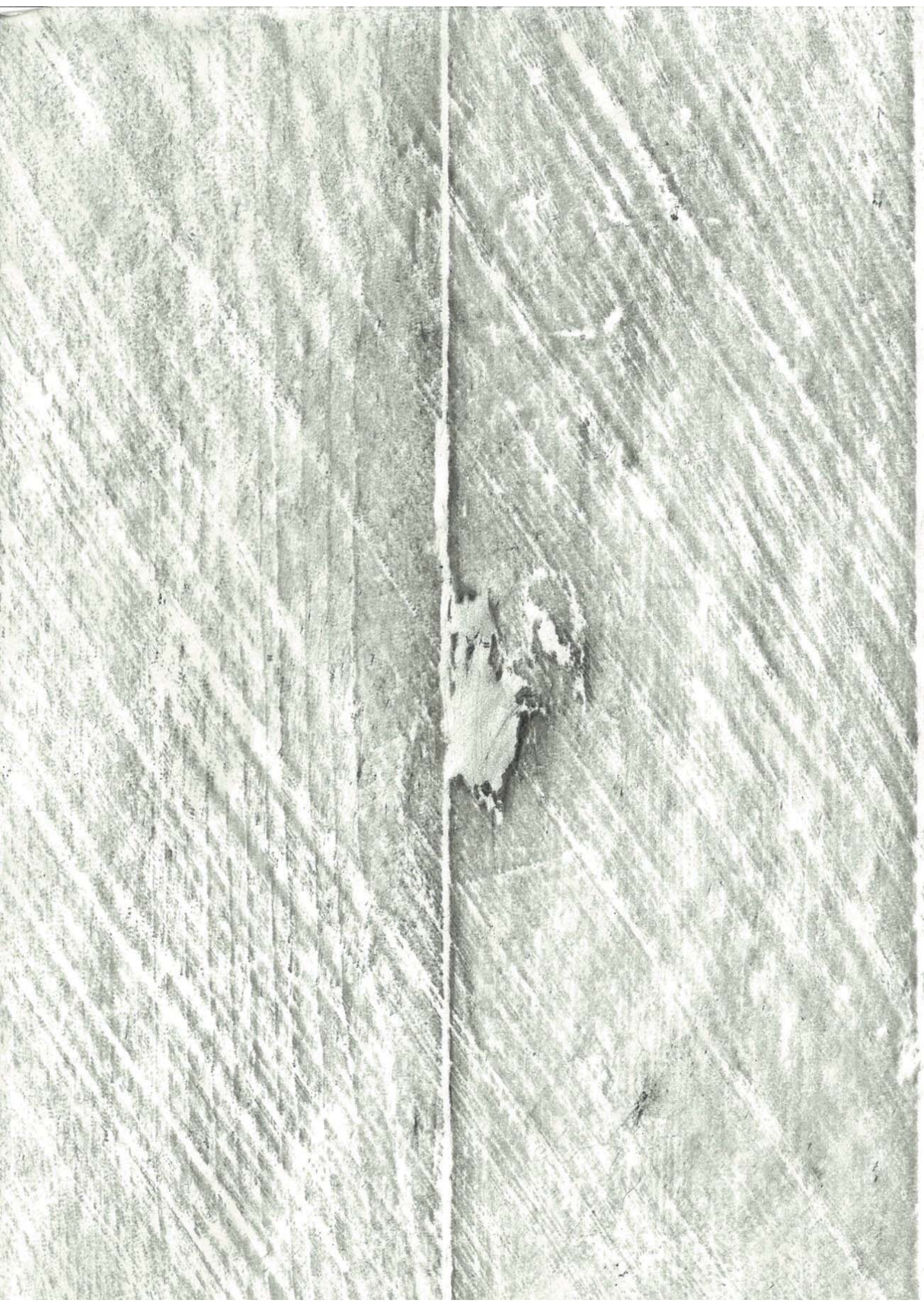
"There is something in common, Lefebvre observes, between the way in which words are inscribed upon a page of writing, and the way in which the movements and rhythms of human and non-human activity are registered in lived space...as texture. 'Practical activity writes on nature', he remarks, 'in a scrawling hand.' Think of the reticular trails left by people and animals as they go about their business around the house, village and town. Caught up in these multiple entanglements, every monument or building, viewed in its context and surroundings, is more 'architextural' than architectural."<sup>41</sup>

This located for me the interwoven contexts of each space, of obscured yet embedded narratives of passage and exchange, of an ebb and flow of time. Discoveries from *Traversing Particles* suggest to me that affecting encounters in the everyday unfold not only through human agency or metaphor, but are embodied within the matter of our environments.

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<sup>41</sup>Ingold, *Being Alive*, 84.





As at 57 Crawford St, events have been pressed and steeped over time into the very wood of 16 Dowling St. A dark tar residue clings in the floorboards' creases, once gripping carpet before its time as a gallery. Harvey tells me these floor boards are rimu and about a hundred years old. Some creak under my weight, punctuating the quiet whiteness as I wander around the room. Removing a single board was an atypically destructive act for me. My work typically shapes temporary interventions. In undoing the levelled surface which otherwise supports sculptures and our own bodies (the floor), we glimpsed underlying histories and material structures: dust, plumbing, forgotten building off-cuts. This was the 'unbecoming' of a gallery — both in a sense of expected behaviour and post-Deleuzian ontology. However, drawing from Grosz we might argue that in undoing the floor's continuity as a floor neither we nor the space regressed to a previous moment in time — rather it was a new opening of difference.<sup>42</sup> Invoking the unceasing forward flow of entropy, this pulling apart was reparable but not reversible.<sup>43</sup> Physically, its rusted hand-wrought nails were replaced with modern ones, and released from the tongue and groove fixing I imagine it will never sit quite as snug again. Ontologically, its identity is tied now more with movement, reaching both into and beyond the gallery's bounds.<sup>44</sup> Now returned to its original location, I picture the board flexing and buckling as time passes, restless — perhaps its un-flush edges becoming a tripping hazard — along with its creaking uttering a reminder of its presence, its agility, and its journey down the street.

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<sup>42</sup>Grosz, "Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming." Grosz, *Becoming Undone*.

<sup>43</sup>Smithson and Flam, "Entropy Made Visible (1973)."

<sup>44</sup>Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries."

As well as physically loosening and relocating features from one site to another, the key dynamic of *Traversing Particles* soon shifted from bounded interiors to the less predictable, more malleable motions encompassing the week of my visit for the work, often in the street and along footpaths.<sup>45</sup> Coincidentally, Australian artist Bianca Hester's exhibition, *movements materialising momentarily*, ran at the other end of the country concurrently with *Traversing Particles*. I feel a strong affinity with Hester's projects, our shared interests are particularly evident in this instance, in which her work was described as:

“...[a] focus on the perpetual movement...of materials. The sculpture is conceived as a movement itself, a sequence of actions within a dynamic system. It is developed around sites of the city's construction and deconstruction... with the fabric of the city, bringing about an expanded form of public sculpture/architecture where multiple relations are brought into negotiation.”<sup>46</sup>

While similar in interest and modes, my practice differs significantly from Hester's; I almost exclusively use materials found within the sites of new works, evoking for me a self-sufficiency of existing environs.

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<sup>45</sup>Doherty, *Contemporary Art*.

<sup>46</sup>“Movements Materialising Momentarily.”

*Traversing Particles* negotiated an uncertain space between matters which seem at once generic and specific.<sup>52</sup> Owing in part to industrial standardisations in producing objects, modern found materials often seem nomadic, untied to any location in which they are encountered. For example, the ubiquitous Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) from Blue Oyster's storeroom seemed in many ways an unremarkable feature, equally at home in the binder's upper floor.<sup>53</sup> Methods employed in *Traversing Particles* reflect art writer Boris Groys' insights that much like performative practices, contemporary installation modes present ways of reiterating artworks as scenes of action and contingency rather than inert product.<sup>54</sup> While 16 Dowling St, 57 Crawford St and the space between them exist simultaneously as the material and subject of art, they also combine the site(s) of formation and presentation. This work explored relational dimensions, connections and distances between two autonomous sites, performing subtle interruptions of space. In the face of the current gentrification of Dunedin's industrial zone, this project looked to the grit, cracks, dust and subtle distinctions which disrupt and act as agents of difference to resist a genericisation of everyday movements from "one place to another."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>If it weren't for clues such as hand stamps and the exhibition's dual site context, one might mistake the Binder's dusty articles assembled by Blue Oyster's new floor hole as having been recovered from beneath, or from any local attic. Moreno and Oroza, "Generic Objects."

<sup>54</sup> Groys, "Politics of Installation | E-Flux."

<sup>55</sup> Kwon, "One Place after Another," April 1, 1997.



*Traversing Particles* tracked paths back and forth, un-situating and resituating relationships to place, softly unsettling found material and ideas of site. Rather than suggesting the unidirectional relationship developed by land artist Robert Smithson in transposing environmental material from 'site' to 'non-site,'<sup>56</sup> *Traversing Particles* sought a more reciprocal and de-hierarchical exchange. As local critic Brendan Philip noted "the work speaks to a mutability of location; the function of a room determined by the objects and activities that occupy it at any given time."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, in trading the material features of each location, their respective identities also became less separable, eroding and interweaving piece by piece as notions of site became less stable. Were there two sites, or a third trailing site spanning the roads and passages between them? Or perhaps a vaster single site that transgressed standard notions of interior and exterior to encompass the entire space of exchange between the two endpoints and everything that they encountered? At what point do all distinctions of site dissolve into a wider field, an open world?<sup>58</sup>

Over the week of traversing found materials the unpredictable conviviality and discourse with visitors and artists were influential and challenging – not only to the unfolding shape of the work but to my underlying conceptions and intentions around *Traversing Particles* and my broader practice too. As contributors to the work, Jake's and others' unprecious relationships to the objects carried was unsettling for me and my process. However this also began to open my practice to more collaborative, energetic and multi-vocal approaches. Where I first sought a quiet space to hear the voices of things, this proposed an integrated zone, allowing humans into the fabric and focus of spaces which I've come to hold onto in my practice.

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<sup>56</sup> Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites."

<sup>57</sup> Philip, "Mapping The Mirage."

<sup>58</sup> Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries."

05.08.2015

*Tomas, TR – “... a durational piece. I've relocated objects from the gallery store room and carried them one by one to this space. And then I've carried objects from here to the gallery space ...they blend and blur with the space...The first object was this floor board, which was pulled right out of the Blue Oyster floor... people have helped me carry things... it builds a connection with the environment... I feel like I'm introducing the gallery to this space, like they're new friends... it could be anything, and then I'm also very particular of what type of objects I want to carry... they all seem to be manmade objects, but the ones I pick are made out of trees...the location is out there but it's also in here.”*

*Visitor, JB – “...the object falls away, the object is in a way just...the activity we are engaged in, and then being engaged in that activity says something. What the activity is is less important than what it says...we're not concerned with what they do, we're concerned with ....”*

*TR – “How they do.”*

*JB – “How they do it, yeah...”*

*TR – “...We're all really interested in what's happening out there too. The construction site just down there, the rubble piles.”*

*JB – “You're working for the observer who comes in here, and actually senses that there's something going on. I didn't know what's going on, but I was aware quite quickly that these things which stand around they're not just standing 'round, they actually have been placed, and they feel [purposeful].*

*TR – “Yeah, I want to encourage a certain kind of attention to the world around us”*

*JB – “[it’s] the challenge of your work in a way, and it makes us talk like this. I think, that’s the interesting thing...art I think so often you see as entertainment or teaching aid, you know, and it’s much more subtle than this, and ...I can’t now tell you what you are, can’t tell you what you’re ideas are, but I have a semblance, to whatever you do. You actually, you feel, you do, you think, you know? You have ideas, live, to me that’s all we can do.”<sup>1</sup>*

Conceived on the outset as a quiet and private investigation into the emptied space of Blue Oyster’s gallery, *Traversing Particles* instead became a journey of collaboration, noise, experimentation, alteration, relocation, traipsing, cohabitation, uncertainty and return. Although my initial interests resided in non-human things of interiors, in what falls outside of human histories and attentions, this project began to blur between dual spaces usually conceived as separate. By this I mean that the gallery and industrial spaces began to weave and merge through swapping their contents and characteristics, and that inviting others into the process of traversing ‘things’ signalled a reintegration of both the human and non-human as social bodies and materials for art practice. Through holding things near and letting them go, *Traversing Particles* encouraged my usual private creative process to shift step by step into the foreground and into the hands of others – into the contingency of a socio-material situation.

# *Dixon Situations* and navigating zones

*Dixon Situations* (September- 2015)

Meeting in afternoon/evening at LBQ, 6 Edward St, Te Aro Wellington; Sony PCM-D50 Recorder and headphones, sequence of walking and carrying directions; paths and access lanes in vicinity of 84 Dixon St, Dixon and Victoria St intersection



The third key work of 2015, *Dixon Situations*, involves explorations in Wellington City which progress modes of practice emerging from *Traversing Particles* in August. Following the shift from working with a single interior in *White Noise and Snares* to activating material discourses between two spaces in *Traversing Particles*, this new work explores complex and tenuous relationships between several marginal city spaces such as demolition zones, back lanes and loading bays. As an assemblage of human and more-than-human subjects including asphalt lanes, dust, gusts, weathered concrete, traffic and urban noise, *Dixon Situations* projects my sculptural and installation practices further into spaces of everyday experience.

The work involved roaming through a one block radius zone around Wellington's Dixon and Victoria Street intersection. Participants were invited by email to meet in the evening at Wellington's *LBQ* bar (Little Beer Quarter) on Edward Street. Equipped with a handheld audio recorder and headphones they were guided out to the streets and directed along unfrequented routes and back lanes by ambiguous directions written in different palm sized books. These actions built on haptic and aural engagements which emerged while carrying objects between the Dunedin gallery and bookbinder's during *Traversing Particles*. They brought the lived experiences of walking, listening, discovery and subtle movements of found materials enacted by participants/collaborators to the forefront i.e. their involvement in the shifting forms and forces of the spaces themselves.

Importantly, the situations I invited others to encounter were informed by a set of material and social contexts of these ubiquitous yet unfamiliar locations. Initially this work emerged from the persistent lure of the now vacant *Modelcrafts and Hobbies* store at 84 Dixon Street, an interior caught in mid-renovation since I encountered it in April this year. Although inhabiting spaces is usually fundamental for my research and art-making, 84 Dixon's restriction of entry led to more contingent engagements with neighbouring areas.

During my numerous visits, I discovered not a coherent sense of place, but a scatter and web of ‘non-places’ in disrepair, largely hidden from street view. With each return to 84 Dixon I circled further out, gathering new understandings of site fluidity; what Marc Auge describes as relationships between an autonomy of a ‘place’ and a less separable multiplicity and movement intrinsic to ‘spaces,’<sup>59</sup> Corners of interest to me were populated by drifts of dust, dumpsters, shipping palettes and discarded fragments which rearranged themselves into different formal compositions<sup>60</sup> while I was away. Ingold’s commentary is pertinent here: “wherever anything lives the infrastructure of the occupied world is breaking up or wearing away, ceaselessly eroded by...inhabitants, both human and nonhuman, as they reincorporate and rearrange its crumbling fragments into their own ways of life.”<sup>61</sup> Rather than retelling recorded histories of these spaces, *Dixon Situations* invited others to move through and contact live and changing environments, involving themselves in the present and emerging forms and blurring distinctions between art and everyday life.<sup>62</sup>

The condition of 84 Dixon was a significant catalyst for a fresh area of work — its torn up carpets, excavated floor and piled rubble presenting striking associative ties to ongoing demolition between Victoria, Dixon and Cuba Streets and extensive road works on Victoria Street and throughout Wellington. These urban renovations are problematic to me with their enactment of gentrification and unsustainable wasting of processed materials in the name of progress

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<sup>59</sup>Auge, *Non-Places*, 84.

<sup>60</sup> Or rather, ‘informal’ arrangements which evoke George Bataille’s concepts of formlessness, the “informe”. Bois and Krauss, *Formless*.

<sup>61</sup>Ingold, “Bindings against Boundaries,” pp.1808–1809.

<sup>62</sup> Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 2002, 30; Kaprow, *Some Recent Happenings*; Kaprow, Lebel, and Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*.

and acceleration. However, their transformations also bring into high relief the 'body' of the city as animate and visceral materiality in ongoing metamorphosis. Extending Heideggerian metaphysics through contemporary 'Object Oriented Ontology', Graham Harman's 'broken tool' theory presents one way of understanding the effects and significance of transitional spaces such as those traced in *Dixon Situations*.<sup>63</sup> The raw edges and fractured surfaces of a broken object, a floor or wall for example, opens up fresh sensitivity to material (and ontological) foundations usually eclipsed by a smoothness of function in supporting habitual activities.<sup>64</sup>

In developing routes, doings and experiences for *Dixon Situations I* noted a recurrence in the ways I engage with the city's structures:

08.09.2015

*While walking in the city I reach to my side, draw fingertips across the changing surfaces of walls, fences, store windows. I feel the textures of these durations as I move through. Against them I register my body in space, I register rhythms of bumps and grit. I listen to the sonorous patterns and feel them shake through my skin, through my bones. I notice the dark residues that gather in the grooves of fingerprints, writing into my sense of self, as relational to each route and surface. It's a reversal of a drawing in a sense, the world draws upon me."*

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<sup>63</sup>Harman, *Tool-Being*.

<sup>64</sup> While the perceptual ruptures can happen in vision as much as other senses, I feel there is a special dual relationship between the immediacy and intimacy of the tactile and the dispersion and pervasiveness of the aural. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*.



During these wanderings my thoughts turn to Francis Alÿs, walking, carrying, tapping a stick along a garden fence as he paces.<sup>65</sup> And to Deleuze. The refrain. Performing little melodies, sending out subtle echoes to fill the air of a strange place, to find a calm and temporary centre for oneself:

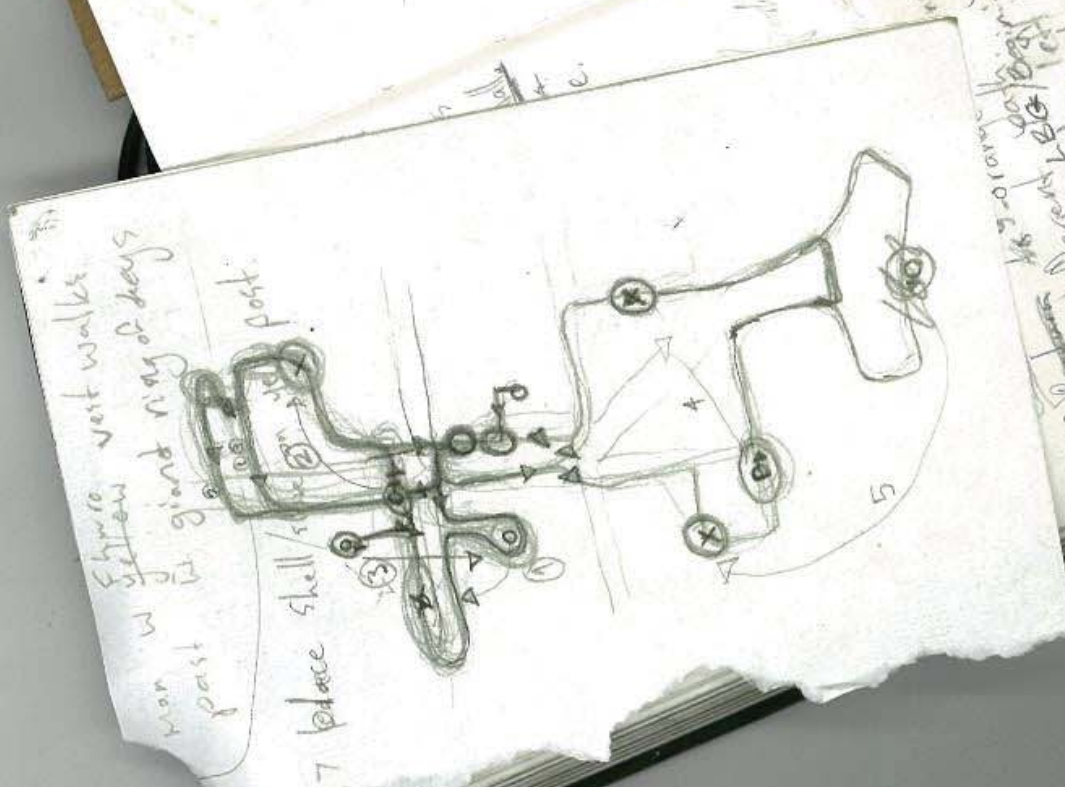
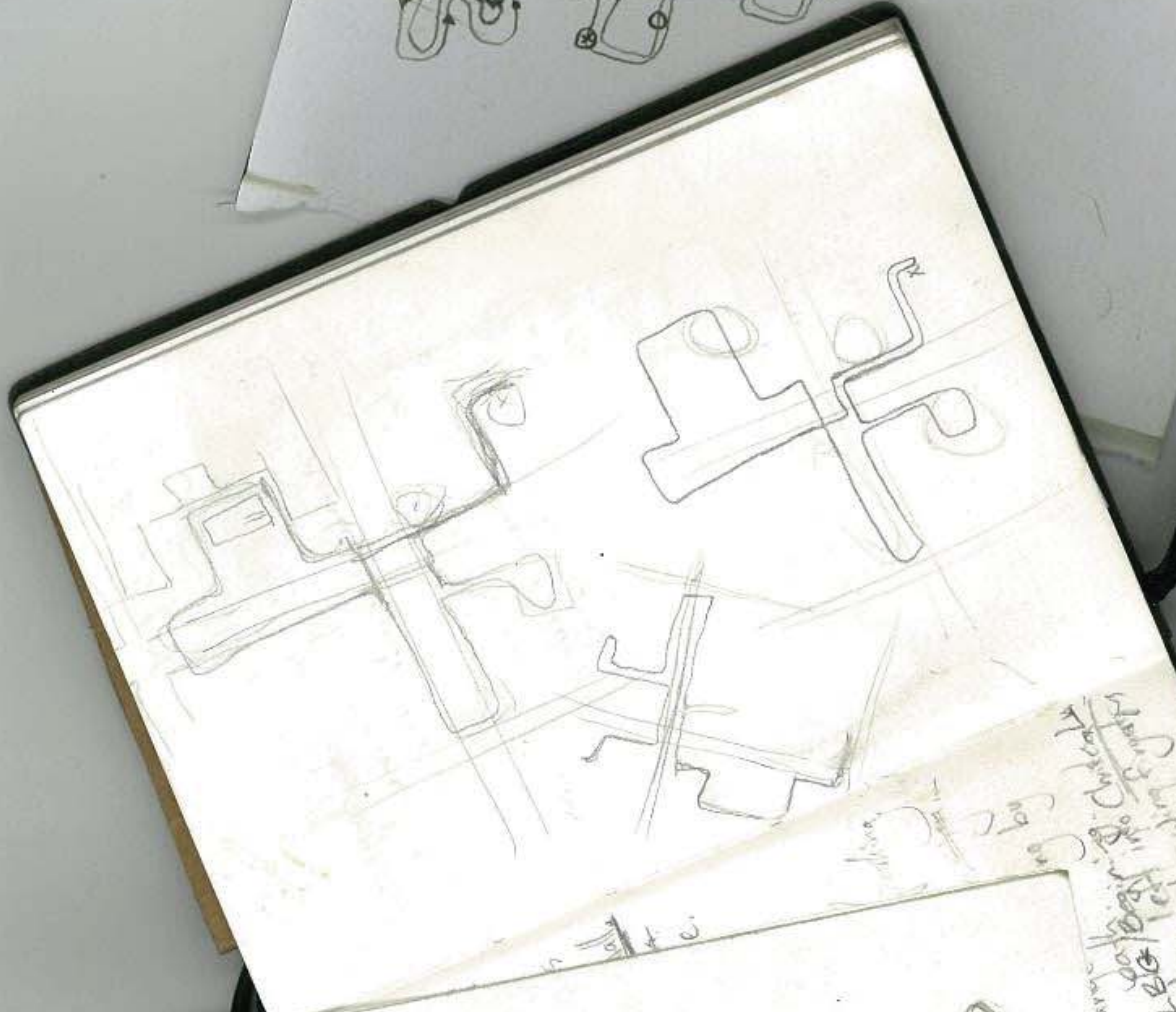
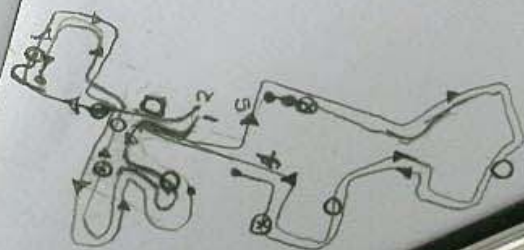
“...in the heart of chaos... a skip...landmarks and marks of all kinds...walks a circle...combining rhythmic vowels and consonants...lets someone in...hazards and improvisation...to join with the world...to meld with it...one ventures from home on the thread of a tune...gestural...lines that mark the customary path...lines of drift...”<sup>66</sup>

Unexpectedly I found most participants spoke through their walks, narrating to themselves, and at times to me, through the PCM audio recorder. For me this was a listening device, to encounter ubiquitous urban sounds on a new register, prompting a different type of awareness and engagement through city spaces. For others it seemed also a way of adding their voice to these scenes. Listening back, some hum tunes, many note details that catch their attention, verbalising associations. While navigating a route with directions that refuse to name streets or obvious landmarks they attempt to locate themselves, to orient their positions in relation to surrounding pathways and buildings.

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<sup>65</sup>Alÿs, *Railings (Fitzroy Square)*.

<sup>66</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 0312.



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Outside of the usual perceptual frames of art (e.g. a picture plane/a gallery etc.) the assortment of objects which make up encountered paths and corners make the borders of this work intentionally less fixed and distinct than my previous interior based installations. The fabric of 'the work' rests less in aesthetic objects and more explicitly in moments of relation between individuals and 'the world'. The directions and parameters given are only softly instructional, enough to catalyse movement and attention. Room is left for different paces, distractions, deviations and durations. For me the significance of the open-ended structure and zone of the *Dixon Situations* is an exploration of 'space' in tension with my own and participant's instincts to establish a sense of 'place'. Citing Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) and phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Marc Auge considers 'places' as distinct assemblies of coexisting objects, acknowledging 'space' as a more flexible phenomenon.<sup>69</sup> As a term which may equally describe an opening, a distance, a span of time or any number of everyday locations, I understand 'space' as in many ways analogous to the inclusive identity of 'things', in which movement, ambiguity and indeterminacy are intrinsic. As a constellation of spaces and tangent paths, my understanding of *Dixon Situations* has in part been informed by Auge's theories of "non-places". Much like the transitory locations or passages of Auge's focus such as airports, malls or carparks, the grungy variety of interstitial spaces visited through *Dixon Situations* are also prolific in contemporary settings. Even more than Auge's examples, they resist notions of stability or deep personal significance and belonging. I learnt, however, that while my initial intention was to lead viewers (listeners) to specific forgotten urban alcoves which I considered to be both strange and affecting, the resulting experiences occurred as much within these non-places as on the diverging routes traversed *between* them.

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<sup>69</sup> Auge, *Non-Places*.

My daily meandering walks inform ongoing research in my practice, and feed most directly into this recent work. Departing from Walter Benjamin's 'flâneur' who seeks crowds and urban spectacles, my journeys through the urban everyday gravitate towards spaces which usually fall outside of the path or attention of the public, to discover the subtler ebb and flow of non-human things which populate what might otherwise be seen as 'vacant' spaces. They prompt a looking and listening closer within the overlooked.<sup>70</sup> Although quotidian and largely neglected these spaces and matters are layered with humble narratives.<sup>71</sup> The walks of my work take influence from French Situationist International practices of psycho geography and the technique of the 'dérive', or 'drift' — unplanned meandering passages through city spaces.<sup>72</sup>

In its exploration of public urban space through walking and auditory attention, *Dixon Situations* also hold similarities to artist Janet Cardiff's recorded audio tours that I experienced through *The Walk Book*.<sup>73</sup> As a part time gallery tour guide I am interested in pushing practices of guiding, perhaps more toward a de-touring, in tenuous routes between objects(/subjects) which fall to the background. Unlike Cardiff's disorienting walks which layer audio from distant spaces and times, those of my work amplified and layered immediate surroundings, making the presence of each step, swish of clothing, each passing car and pedestrian peculiarly vivid. The distinct frequencies picked up in *Dixon Situations* from each building's

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<sup>70</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 415–455; Ana Luz, "Places In-Between: The Transit(ional) Locations of Nomadic Narratives," 152.

<sup>71</sup> Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*.

<sup>72</sup> Shepard and Smithsimon, *The Beach Beneath the Streets*; Wark, *The Beach beneath the Street*.

<sup>73</sup> Cardiff et al., *Janet Cardiff*.

electrics, acoustics and air vent for example also had strangely disorienting effects, but unlike Cardiff's work, this was through locating oneself more acutely in the contingent everyday space of each present moment. The open-ended site-based situations which heightened and augmented experiences of the everyday such as Pierre Huyghe's *Untilled* (2012), Ryan Gander's *Locked Room Scenario* (2011), or Jeff Hull's, *Jejune Institute* project (2008)<sup>74</sup> offer potential directions for my work into more ambitious and potentially collaboratively created projects.

I consider the situations which unfolded through these walks as a continuation and evolution of sculptural and installation practices explored through *White Noise and Snares*, *Traversing Particles* and my broader research. Through the casual and candid dialogue of an email to a friend and collaborator, I observed a specific set of sensibilities have been significantly informing my work for as long as I have inhabited city spaces:

25.08.2015

*Wandering, carrying thru streets and alleys...temporary ramshackle compositions in alleys, against walls, fences, etc. this is where so much of my work and inspiration comes from. Walking and encountering these ordinary yet unique and fascinating materials and chance compositions, which are like abstract paintings or sculptures in their own right, yet not representational or abstracted from interpretations of the world, but as physical, self-present things of the world.*

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<sup>74</sup> a city scale, alternate reality game in San Francisco

*Dixon Situations* has lead me to sketch an as yet incomplete map for upcoming projects. I am beginning to draw relationships between drifting dust and the city under reconstruction which extend Krauss' discussions of their roles as indexes of events in time<sup>75</sup> through Merleau-Ponty's body-world relational 'ontology of the flesh'.<sup>76</sup> At different scales I view their unfixed forms as also effecting an emergence of new milieus, new spaces to experience. I find tentative yet compelling relationships for instance between ubiquitous air ventilation and Wellington's notorious wind as characteristics of the city as both contemporary ecosystem and living, breathing entity of which we are an infused part. In this sense, my creative practices outside of the studio's four walls have shifted my engagements of space from singular sites to more open-ended situations in broader zones.

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<sup>75</sup> Exemplified for instance in the dust 'glazes' accrued over a number of months in Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915-1923). Krauss, "Notes on the Index," 75; Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 226–231.

<sup>76</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 65–66.

# conclusion

This set of explorations aimed to open new attitudes toward and engagements with a range of commonplace spaces as assemblages of affecting materiality. Through embodied modes of inhabitation the three key works involved helped in locating and expanding my relationships with expanded sculptural modes, testing dynamics of site responsiveness. The progressions through the set of investigations brought to my attention that spaces and 'sites' are never conceptually or physically stable, never single entities. Rather they shuffle, drift and transform along with me.

Through the reflective practices of writing, making and extended research into urban spaces, new materialist discourse and related artists have shown me how significant my unique upbringing and contexts have been in shaping my art practice. My evolving approaches in *White Noise and Snares*, *Traversing Particles* and *Dixon Situations* have endeavoured to draw my idiosyncratic research practices — including conscientious dwelling, listening, contacting and moving through environments — more directly into the foreground as artwork elements, rather than background preparations. At the outset each of the three works seemed autonomous, following diverging tangents and distinct contexts. Through this document however, the patterns and spaces drawn between the make their progression more evident. Each work in the project as a whole also holds commonalities in their involvements with subtle and temporary modes of spatial practice.

The sites of my practice do not propose to be more or less important than any other found space. Rather, they hold significance in forming temporary frames of focus through which to develop more meaningful engagements with the commonplace corners of our environments.

*White Noise and Snares* was born from a peculiar intersection of contexts surrounding the 'Old Museum Block' which brought my art practice face to face with my personal narratives in unprecedented ways. Drawing together this physical site, dynamics from the social and material 'collectively' of my background and contemporary New Materialist insights this basement work triggered a shift in my conceptual and practical framework around site responsive approaches. What began in *White Noise and Snares* as an anxious and introspective occupation, a confinement of space, came to spill out across Dunedin streets in a more complex and collaborative set of events. Responding to the contexts of Blue Oyster Gallery and Dutybound's architecture, their past renovations and encroaching gentrification, *Traversing Particles* enlisted humble objects and visitors as agents of subtle differencing and renegotiation of space. Initially conceived as quiet and intimate, this journey of uncertainty, noise and collaboration brought my private creative process into the view and hands of others which was both daunting and rewarding. *Dixon Situations* opened these dual-site relationships further, into dispersed areas of central Wellington footpaths and access lanes.

Negotiating relationships between installation, spatial intervention and performative situations the project as a whole sought to open awareness toward neglected spaces as having agency, both with subtlety and significance. Though I set out to gather a more cohesive understanding of my relationships with distinct corners of urban habitats, what has unfolded is a fragmentation and diffusion of notions of site, belonging, and engagements with an animate sense of materiality.



I now better comprehend that what I am looking for through my creative practice does not reside in any one stable space or single gesture. Characteristic of a practice in which process takes precedence over production, reach not concise answers but a more an opening of my field of concern than when I began. Through embodied experiences of commonplace things, the idiosyncrasies of found spaces grip me for some time, then soon propel me along new trails to encounter new objects, new spaces. Overall it seems that the 'site' of affecting materiality in the world is not a bounded place, but a plurality of spaces, zones, and contingent discovery. "To inhabit the world is to live life in the open."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries," 1796.

# additional figures

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“Effect Of The Heavy Rains In The Dowling Street Cutting.” Otago Witness, April 16, 1902. Papers Past.

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Tomas Richards. Graphite rubbings made from the Blue Oyster Gallery floor on the first visit for *Traversing Particles* research (June 2015)

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Images taken by participants while walking in *Dixon Situations* (September 2015)

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Tomas Richards. Preparative sketches, locations, routes and directions for *Dixon Situations* (September 2015)

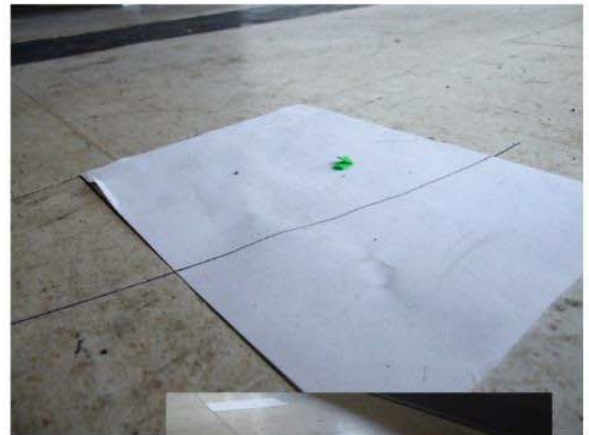
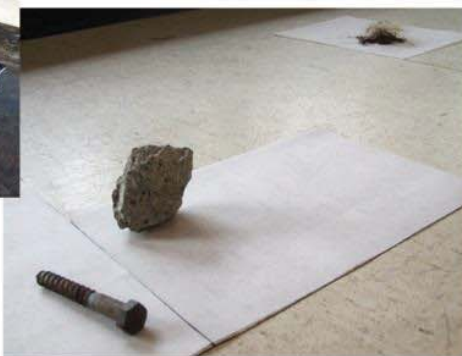
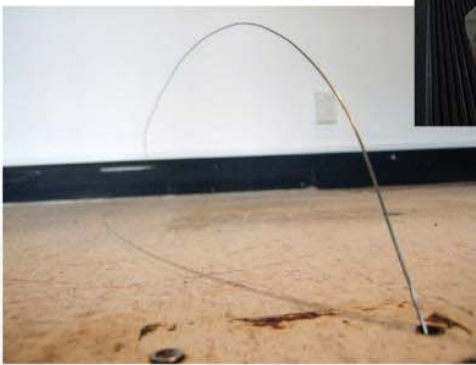
# appendix

Key works which led into the thesis work from the broader two year masters project



### *Poised Vigour* (details) (March 2014)

At night, clay-rich soil from Pollhill Reserve mixed with saliva and formed by hand around found asphalt fragment until covered; one bread-bag-worth of loose clay, screws released from MDF wall panels, ex-weatherboard from artist's home, building off-cut from 296 Willis (corner of Palmer St), found coal fragment, zip-lock bag of soil, combined floor grit drawn across wall via carbon paper.



*Urban Bodies, Morhic Assemblies (details) (14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2014)*

101 Wakefield St, Wellington; air vents, carpet tile, lino and marks, hair, objects found in adjacent garden, twine, packing tape, A4 paper sheets, steel wire.

[urbandreambrokerage.org.nz/urban-bodies](http://urbandreambrokerage.org.nz/urban-bodies)

[urban-bodies-wgtn.tumblr.com/](http://urban-bodies-wgtn.tumblr.com/)



*Matter of Presence* (details) (2014), Engine Room Gallery

Gallery dust swept behind glass pane from Dominion Museum construction skip, floor panels upturned, under-floor iron dust rubbed over unpainted wall hole filler, soil collected from garden adjacent to gallery, floor dents filled with white paper-clay, floor panel gaps re-filled with bog, sanded and repainted.

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