I, Ashton Tucker, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History.

It is entitled:
Virtual and Physical Environments in the work of Pipilotti Rist, Doug Aitken, and Olafur Eliasson

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Virtual and Physical Environments in the work of Pipilotti Rist, Doug Aitken, and Olafur Eliasson

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ABSTRACT

The common concerns of artists Pipilotti Rist (b. 1962), Doug Aitken (b. 1968), and Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) are symptomatic of key questions in contemporary art and culture. In this study, I examine key works by each artist, emphasizing their common interest in the interplay of virtual space and physical space and, more generally, their use of screen aesthetics. Their focus on the creative interplay of virtuality and physicality is indicative of their understanding of the fragility and uncertainty of physical perception in a world dominated by screen-based communication. In chapter one, I explore Pipilotti Rist’s *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* and argue that the artist creates work where screen based projection and installation are interrelated elements due to her interest in creating spaces that engage the viewer both physically and virtually. In chapter two, I discuss Doug Aitken’s work and argue that he democratizes the viewing experience in a more radical way than Pipilotti Rist. In the final chapter, I discuss the work of Olafur Eliasson as it relates to California Light and Space art and the phenomenological aspects of the eighteenth-century phantasmagoria. Informed primarily by phenomenology, this study argues that the artists share common aesthetic beliefs related to their generation of artists.
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Ashton Tucker
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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Pipilotti Rist (b. 1962), Doug Aitken (b. 1968), and Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) are widely known and internationally recognized artists whose primary mode of production is installation. The focus of my study will involve the study of key works by these artists, emphasizing their use of screen aesthetics to show their interest in creating virtual spaces in reference to the physical environment and to explore the nature of our perceptions of both virtual and physical realities. While the work of these artists differs greatly, they have a similar aesthetic view of the contemporary world and how we view it, where virtual reality is increasingly a part of physical reality. This is characteristic of these artists and typical of their generation.

Literature Review

Substantial critical literature exists with regard to Rist, Aitken, and Eliasson. These books have been helpful in establishing critical responses to these artists. I have drawn on numerous critical studies and public responses to the work of these artists. Writings by the artists themselves were intensely valuable to this research because they gave insight to the artists’ beliefs in terms of their creative processes. In particular, the book *Broken Screen: 26 Conversations with Doug Aitken, Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative* (2005) was important because it contained conversations between Aitken and Rist and Aitken and Eliasson. This text is comprised of informal conversations between artists, architects, filmmakers, and designers, either conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or through electronic communication. While their conversations vary in topic, they also show a shared belief in the creative potential of the screen and screen aesthetics.
Outside of the artists’ own statements, Vivian Sobchack’s works on phenomenology have been valuable to this study in opening up ways of examining these artists’ focus on structures of experience. This scholar has studied the link between mass media and pop culture and what place phenomenology has in this interplay. In her contribution to Marquard Smith’s anthology *Visual Culture Studies: Interviews with Key Thinkers* (“Phenomenology, Mass Media, and Being-in-the-World”), Sobchack posited that phenomenology insists on understanding perception before abstract concepts. In a chapter, entitled “Is Any Body Home? Embodied Imagination and Visible Evictions,” in the book *Carnal Thoughts*, Sobchack considered the notion that one experiences things first on a bodily level, then on a visual level. While the artists in this study create visual effects, phenomenology and the process of perception on a corporeal rather than intellectual level is important in studying their work.

*Kissing Architecture* by Sylvia Lavin investigates collaborations between architecture and contemporary art. Lavin uses the term “kissing” to describe the intimate nature of this interaction. She primarily examines multimedia installations that take place on architectural surfaces. Lavin goes into great detail about the nature of architectural surface as a space that interacts with both the installation and with the spectator. Most importantly, Lavin uses Rist and Aitken as examples of this intimate relationship, underscoring the sensual and corporeal nature of both Rist and Aitken’s work.

Jean Baudrillard’s writings on simulation, simulacra, and his critique of technology are also important to this study. Baudrillard theorized that, due to advancements in technology, there is little distinction between reality and simulacra as they are framed in contemporary culture. He credited this to several phenomena, including contemporary media like the Internet, exchange value, global capitalism, urbanization, and the obscurity of language. In particular, the
prevalence of the Internet and urbanization, which divides the human from nature, are significant to this study because Rist, Aitken, and Eliasson blur the boundary between technology and nature in a receptive, friendly manner.

In addition to these sources, I have read and used essays by Alex Potts, Carolyn Kane, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Daniel Birnbaum.

**Chapters**

I will examine the role of virtuality and physicality in the work of Pipilotti Rist, Doug Aitken, and Olafur Eliasson in three chapters using a critical and phenomenological approach to key works by each artist. Each chapter includes biographic, contextual, and critical information that will highlight the reasons why certain tendencies are important to each artist. In the first chapter, I examine the work of Pipilotti Rist, in particular, her work *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*. Here, I will be utilizing the theory of relational aesthetics and Deleuzian color theory. I will argue that Rist creates work where screen based projection and installation are interrelated elements due to her interest in creating an art that engages spectators physically in a real space, which, at the same time, opens up a virtual utopian space of imagination. These two sides of her artistic model are necessary in communicating her radical and feminist politics.

In chapter two, I will explore Doug Aitken’s *Sleepwalkers* and *Glass Horizon* in detail, focusing on his use of video projection, particularly in relation to its physical environment and to earlier forms of video practice as well as contemporary developments. I will argue that his work democratizes the art-viewing experience in a more radical way than Rist by presenting it in a manner that stepped outside of museum function. Vivian Sobchack’s writings on phenomenology and Sylvia Lavin’s *Kissing Architecture* inform my approach this chapter.
Secondarily, I will comment on Charles Green’s criticism of Aitken’s work in the essay “The Memory Effect: Anachronism, Time and Motion.”

In the third and final chapter, I will discuss the work of Olafur Eliasson in relation to the art-historical traditions relating to aspects of Light and Space Art. I will consider the link between the eighteenth-century phantasmagoria and Eliasson’s work with light projection and how his work evidences his interest in a cinematic approach. Finally, I will compare Eliasson to Rist and Aitken to show that, while their work differs, their aesthetics reflect the notion of contemporary anxieties that exist in relation to virtuality in physical space.

**Significance**

In this thesis, I draw together phenomenological approaches with media studies and aesthetic theory, as well as art-historical perspectives in order to promote a better understanding of contemporary installation art. All three of these artists have been studied extensively in the past and future developments on each artist are inevitable considering their popularity. However, these artists are not commonly studied together. Yet there is an obvious link between these artists based on shared aesthetic concerns and stylistic strategies. Rist, Aitken, and Eliasson share an awareness of the uncertainty about our place in a world where virtual reality has become a feature of our physical reality. This is not only characteristic of the artists in this study, but also symptomatic of artists emerging in the 1990s.
Chapter One: Feminism and the Utopia: Pipilotti Rist’s Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters), 2008

At its essence, installation art is about viewer participation. Because the genre is not autonomous, the nature of participation varies from artist to artist and from installation to installation. In other words, one artist may require less from spectators, while another encourages direct involvement. Installation also involves a great deal of preparation on the part of the artist in designing a space, be it a physical construction or a metaphorical change. The shift in installation art, as described by art historian Alex Potts, is a new focus on staging and display as essential to the substance of the work.¹ My argument in this chapter is that Pipilotti Rist makes both installation and screen-based projection central, interrelated elements to her work because of her interest in creating an art that, at once, engages spectators physically in a real space and opens up a virtual, utopian space of imagination. Both sides of this artistic model are necessary in communicating her radical utopian and feminist politics.

Biography

Pipilotti Rist is a Swiss videographer, sculptor, and photographer. She began experimenting with video in the late 1980s as a student at the School of Design in Basel, Switzerland. This would later lead to her production in the genre with which she is most associated: installation. Her installations are meant as a “freeing exercise” for video.”² In this way, she aspires to free video from the television and project it onto the room, thereby transforming architecture, objects, and surfaces.³ As an installation artist, Rist continually

² Anne Söll, Pipilotti Rist (Cologne: DuMont, 2005), 40.
³ Dorothy Spears, “Pipilotti Rist: MoMA,” Art in America 97, no. 1 (January 2009), 105.
explores the relationship between space, observer, and video projection and, thus, analyzes and redefines the boundaries between them.

**Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters), 2008-2009**

*Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* (fig. 1) was installed at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from November 19, 2008 to February 2, 2009 in the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium. The installation was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in what seemed to critics an attempt to revitalize the institution’s relation with the public. Rist transformed this space and created an installation that not only encouraged spectator participation, but also changed the rules of museum etiquette.

*Pour Your Body Out* exemplified Rist’s use of the architecture of the site as part of her work. The walls of the museum’s atrium were filled with projected video footage in the same “film-family” as Rist’s feature film *Pepperminta* (fig. 2), which was released the following year. John Slyce first used the term “film-family” to describe the style of her work at any given point. It refers to videos created around the same time with stylistic and thematic similarities. *Pepperminta* and the work created alongside the film are visually similar and are considered to be a part of the same film-family. These works were identified as part of the same film family retroactively—after *Pepperminta* was released. In these works, there is heavy emphasis on capturing the human body. Rist accomplishes this by close-ups of skin, hair, nails, and other facets of the human physique.

In this film family, there is also a focus on color, particularly pinks, greens, and blues. The vibrancy of these colors is key. Rist uses saturated colors, strong contrasts, and negative

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images. Blues become violets and reds are so bright that they appear to be on fire. The images selected for the installation are a part of a sixteen-minute video loop whose colors are characterized as a “remix of Fauvism.”

Carolyn L. Kane characterized Rist’s color use as “Deleuzian.” In the article “The Synthetic Color Sense of Pipilotti Rist, or, Deleuzian Color Theory for Electronic Media Art,” Kane used Giles Deleuze’s color theory in describing the importance of color for media/video artists, like Rist. While Deleuze’s theory is based in painting, according to Kane, the theory is structured out of analogies to inorganic and electronic machinery. The emphasis on synthetic color is important to note and makes this theory pertinent to this study because Rist’s work is not only color-rich, but also often synthetic. The colors she uses are often not found in nature, which highlights the virtuality of the work. As Kane emphasized, color is a form of tactile, non-cognitive perception. The use of electronic color, in this sense, does not take away from the work and, in fact, lends itself to sensory experience.

The artist uses various camera angles and viewpoints that shift from one angle to the next. This adds to the work’s sense of weightlessness. Rist composed the music that accompanied the images with her band, Les Reines Prochaines. The music is described as drowsy, trance music that one may associate with a spa or a yoga session.

Lastly, there is an emphasis on nature. There are shots of blades of grass, of the sky, and of the human body as it appears in a natural setting. Rist revisited her videos that follow these

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8 Saltz, “MoMA’s Sex Change.”
characteristics and reshapes them, making them site-specific.\(^9\) None of the footage in this installation was created specifically for the site, but was altered to fit the confines of the space.

The visual qualities of *Pour Your Body Out* were consistent with the artist’s production prior to its installation. The images consisted of quickly changing impressions and contrasting atmospheres, while demonstrating notions of the natural cycle of growth and decay.\(^10\) In any twenty-minute interval while sitting in the installation, the viewer saw images that were either contradictory or images that changed within a blink of an eye. At some points, the camera would circle a field of bright red tulips, sometimes diving into the tulips and immersing the screen in red and, at other times, zooming out to just a hint of the tulips juxtaposed with a blue sky.\(^11\) Almost as soon as the viewer became acquainted with the image, a new image was presented. The image was then a young, redheaded woman with freckled skin in a similar landscape to the previous image. The image of the woman became an extreme close-up, making it possible to almost count each hair on her arm. The image projected shifted again, this time to a scene of contradictions. An underwater image of lily pads overlapped, in the manner of a double exposure, an image of rainwater with bits of plastic, rotting fruit, and a rusty can of Red Bull.

The content of these images is also characteristic of Rist’s work outside of the *Pepperminta* film-family. The visual element of the flower is an important tool that Rist continues to use in her art. For example, the flower is central to an earlier work called *Ever is Overall* (1997) (fig. 3). In this video, a young woman strides confidently down a city street, using a large metal flower to smash car windows.\(^12\) Underwater images are key to creating a

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\(^9\) Slyce, 50.


\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
sense of weightlessness in much of her work and were a part of an earlier installation called *Sip My Ocean* (1996) (fig. 4).\(^{13}\) Subtle references to menstruation as a sign of fertility in *Pour Your Body Out* were instrumental in some of her previous work, including *Blutclip* (1993) (fig. 5).\(^{14}\) Because these motifs recur frequently in Rist’s work, she has created a visual language that is unique and recognizable to the spectator. Therefore, Rist’s visual language stood as a point of reference for the viewer in *Pour Your Body Out*.

Lastly, though perhaps most importantly, one should note that Rist’s work is, including the video projections in *Pour Your Body Out*, not simply narrative, but counter-narrative. Counter-narrativity, described by Teresa de Lauretis, is the act of narrative distortion.\(^{15}\) For *Pour Your Body Out*, there was some semblance of a narrative. Though there are no words, the viewer can follow the protagonist through a field, searching for important, albeit, unknown objects. The viewer also may have recognized that this was a story about an Earth mother performing a fertility rite. However, the narrative is disrupted by the quickly changing scenes and the juxtaposition of scenes on adjacent screens.

**Space and Interaction**

An important aspect of *Pour Your Body Out* is the space in which the installation takes place. The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium was designed by Yoshio Taniguchi as part of his plan for the renovation and expansion of the building on West 53rd Street in Manhattan.\(^{16}\) The atrium is named for the President Emeritus of the Board of Trustees and his

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\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.


wife. The goal of the architect was “to create an ideal environment for art and people through the imaginative use of light, materials and space.”  

The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium, also simply called the Marron Atrium, is a prime example of Taniguchi’s vision for the renovated MoMA. The atrium rises 110 feet from the second floor of the building at its highest points, where the lobby and entrance are visible below. It is an enormous space that also contains entrances to two galleries: one for contemporary art and another for prints and illustrated books. Because the space’s four walls have an assortment of openings and elevations, the atrium offers a variety of different views. Lastly, Taniguchi’s trademark high-set square window is asymmetrically placed on the east wall and looks into the third floor architecture and design galleries. The second part of the installation’s title, 7354 Cubic Meters, is a direct reference to the atrium’s calculated volume. The atrium is an impressive space and, when used by the right artist, can be an interesting canvas on which to work.

Rist’s use of the architecture and the space of the Marron Atrium at the Museum of Modern Art became the framework in which the spectators were encouraged to actively interact with the installation and with one another. The artist is what some may call a choreographer of space. A choreographer plans and controls an event or composes a set of actions to be followed. Rist, in the same way as any other choreographer, organized a space in terms of actions for her viewers and controlled the space in which the viewer and the installation met, creating “an unforgettable experience of images and atmosphere.”

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17 Ibid., 53.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Schreuder, 177.
Rist also focused on the body in this installation. In an interview about her work *Gravity*, *Be My Friend* (2007) (fig. 6), Rist expressed the desire to study the human body in her work.

I have always been interested in how the body moves in the room in relation to the work of art. I want to emphasise [sic] this meditative dimension by trying to get the installation to suspend gravity for a while and reduce muscle tension. It’s easier to relax one’s muscles when lying down…Your ability to relax your muscles will have an effect on your thinking. It’s what’s called “somatopsychic.”

This desire to create work that allows viewers to relax both their minds and bodies is something that remains in Rist’s work and particularly in *Pour Your Body Out*. The projection of the video was an all over experience—a site based in a phenomenological approach. In an interview with Patricia Bickers, Rist goes into detail about her desire to create an immersive space.

…I try to work as immersively as possible because I think we always try to frame everything behind and within the square format and it affects us strongly. It is a kind of remedy to make the work as huge as possible—it becomes like our skin.

At the center of the space, Rist placed a large, turquoise circular sofa on plush brown carpet. In the center of the couch is white shag carpet, followed by black carpet in the center of the white shag. The artist attempted to recreate the human eye, with the couch as the iris. Some spectators reclined on the iris-shaped sofas, while others sang and danced around the area to the music playing in the background. Many cuddled together on the couch or briefly napped. Per the artist’s request, spectators removed their shoes before entering the installation space. As Catrien Schreuder stated, the act of complete relaxation was the moment in which the viewers

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21 Schreuder, 179
23 Slyce, 50.
24 Schreuder, 177.
“surrendered themselves to the images.” Schreuder found herself in a similar position, noting that “complete surrender” is the best way to view an installation by Rist.

The perception of other spectators around you also plays an important role in how this installation was viewed. In discarding their shoes, the spectators also discarded their conventional codes of behavior. Instead of people moving quietly through the galleries, there was a relaxed bustle. This was in accordance with what Rist envisioned for the installation. On the entrance wall text to the installation, Rist wrote:

Please feel as liberated as possible and move as freely as you can or want to…Watch the videos and listen to the sound in any position or movement. Practise [sic] stretching, pour your body out of your hips or watch through your legs. Rolling around and singing are also allowed.

This further indicated Rist’s desire to create a space where viewers were free to do what they wanted and perceive the installation in an individual manner. This allowed spectators to interact with the installation and each other in ways that are unusual in a gallery space. This may also be related to phenomenology because the viewer’s experience was based on bodily perception—of the installation and of the other spectators—and not on digesting abstract concepts.

**Relational Aesthetics**

In Rist’s case, the art of installation is intertwined with the concept of relational aesthetics. In the 1990s, French curator Nicolas Bourriaud presented the idea of a “microtopia” in art. An artist designs a microtopia as a utopian-inspired space. This concept is important in defining Rist’s work. The microtopia requires the artist to create a space within a space, thus leaving behind the notion of a future utopia in favor of a functioning microtopia in the here and

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25 Ibid., 177.
26 Ibid., 177.
27 Schreuder, 180.
Perhaps because of this theory’s arrival in the 1990s and the Internet around the same time, relational aesthetics and the theme of creating a space within a space may be connected to the idea of virtuality within physical space. Similarly, Potts noted that realism, or the sense of something real, in contemporary art culture does not rely on “real things or scenes or situations being presented,” but about the projection and staging of these objects. This too seems symptomatic of a contemporary preoccupation with virtuality. Rist created a microtopia with Pour Your Body Out by projecting real objects in real space, while creating a utopia within the real space.

Bourriaud identified a group of artists who, in response to social relationships being formed superficially through means of electronic devices, used social interaction as the basis of their artistic production. This tendency was then called ‘relational aesthetics’ or relational art. The art created under this definition invented a social environment, where interaction with one another and participation in a shared activity is the primary focus. Relational art also often envisions the spectators as a mini-community. In this way, the artwork is not only an encounter between viewer and object, but also an encounter between viewers. Because Rist created a space that invited spectators to interact with the work in such a way that interaction with one another was, at least vicariously, encouraged, Pour Your Body Out was a relational artwork.

Some may consider this installation an interactive space, but not an example of relational aesthetics. However, Rist did not only intend for spectators to interact with the space, but with

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29 Ibid., 13
30 Potts, 19.
31 Bourriaud, 17.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 17-18.
one another as well. In the interview with Bickers, Rist intimated about what I would consider a case of relational aesthetics.

In life you are often alone, but when you come together in imaginary rooms you become a common body.\(^\text{34}\)

This reads like a claim that this installation was not only meant for viewer interaction with the piece, but with one another. This is also, perhaps, indicative of Rist’s own interest in creating virtual spaces.

Critics of the installation, however, have viewed Rist’s attempt at intimacy as meaningless. Dorothy Spears, writer for *Art in America*, believed that Rist’s appeal for intimacy in a public setting seemed “hollow, like chatting up a stranger on a plane, and even a little cloying.”\(^\text{35}\) While this is a valid observation, I posit that, in a time where primary social interaction now takes place through electronic means, Rist is bringing physical perception and physical interaction to the forefront. Certainly, Rist makes a valiant effort to get people to interact with the installation and one another.

In this installation, viewer participation and active engagement are different from the way a viewer engages with a painting. In front of a painting, there is room for contemplation and the spectator may engage with the work intellectually. But in *Pour Your Body Out*, the spectator is connected to the installation in a physical way that is uncommon to the museum space without sacrificing the contemplative aspect of art.\(^\text{36}\)

**Installation and the Body**

When we gaze at the human form, we experience much more than our own physical appearance. The sight of the body offers a perspective of the world in which we live, power

\(^{34}\) Bicker, 3.
\(^{35}\) Spears, 105.
\(^{36}\) Slyce, 50.
relations, taboos, and ideals.\textsuperscript{37} As such, the body has been a constant source for artistic production, including video and installation. Physical perception of the body, the spectator’s own and the body presented as an image or art object, is the primary focus of \textit{Pour Your Body Out}.

For Rist, sight and sensation become one and the same. Recently, Swedish neurologists learned that it is possible to give people the feeling that they occupy another person’s body.\textsuperscript{38} Through the combination of sight and sensation, the brain establishes a connection between what is on the screen and the body one inhabits. Schreuder contends that the perception of the body transforms the experience of self.\textsuperscript{39} Because of the way we look at our own bodies, we perceive that any body we see from above to be our own.\textsuperscript{40} Rist exploited this concept in the images projected in \textit{Pour Your Body Out}. The artist used overhead angles to simulate the idea of being one with the person on the screen. Other angles were close to the body, but, rather than being shot as a mirror image for the viewer, they were taken from behind or from over a visible shoulder. This indicates an emphasis on creating a first person point-of-view. The attention paid to making the video itself immersive, to the point that spectators felt as if they are a part of the video work, further indicated that Rist might have found the experience of the viewer and an embodied perception more important than the work itself.

Observation of the body plays an important role in Rist’s work. Because of this, she picked an assortment of shots and varying perspectives. Rist took her inspiration from

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 120
\textsuperscript{39} Schreuder, 179.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
biofeedback, a relaxation technique based on the meditative observation of one’s own body. This can be seen in her use of tight shots of body parts. For example, a close-up of an eye faded seamlessly to an underwater scene. It is as though the visitor observed the same body part, but on cellular scale. This, coupled with the state of relaxation that Rist constructed, lead to a meditative relationship between the installation and the body. Thus, similar to the Swedish neurologists, Rist played with perceptions of self. By stimulating various senses concurrently, Rist created associative connections. The associative connection was not limited to humans and included slugs, worms, and a wild boar. The spectator may have associated himself/herself with the body on screen, be it human or otherwise.

**Feminization of Space**

In order to understand how Rist’s installation changes the perception of the space, it is important to understand how spaces are gendered. Museum theorist Donald Preziosi asserted that museums, being such a dominant feature in our “cultural” landscape, frame our assumptions about our past and ourselves. An important assumption and distinction we make amongst ourselves as a culture has always been related to gender. Feminist theory has shown that museums are gendered spaces. In a museum, women’s production and history are “under-represented and oversimplified.” The Western canon of achievement equates genius with masculinity and emotion and passivity with femininity. For example, the canon of art history favors “male masters” and there are no female equivalents to Michelangelo. Furthermore, the treatment of female subjects by male artists is often as goddess, muse, or temptress and she is

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41 Ibid., 179.
43 Ibid., 18.
almost always passive. The museum also shows that female bodies are colonized by the masculine gaze and enforces stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.\textsuperscript{46}

The construction and founding of a museum is important in establishing its relation to gender. The Museum of Modern Art is regarded as a masculine space, partly due to its director from 1929-1968, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. He constructed a masculine space by characterizing the institutions female founders as philanthropists rather than policy makers, removing decorative flourishes from the townhouse, and transforming the institution into a functionalist white cube—all of which conveyed a masculine identity. Since its founding, MoMA has been regarded as the institution that set the canon for modern art—a canon that consists primarily of male, European artists that are still considered stars to this day.\textsuperscript{47}

MoMA’s relationship with modernism and modernism’s subsequent identity as masculine was a topic of debate for Carol Duncan. Duncan declared in “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas” that MoMA established a narrative with its permanent collection. This narrative consists of a perceivably natural progression of style and integral to this progression of style is a model of “moral action,” where women serve as a muse, but rarely as an artist.\textsuperscript{48} The relation to modernism and masculinity makes Rist’s commission that much more unique.

Critic Jerry Saltz was the first to recognize how Rist feminized the Marron Atrium. Though using a decidedly sexist way to open his review of the exhibition (“The deliciously named Swiss Miss, Pipilotti Rist…”), the critic recognized that MoMA has a masculine history.\textsuperscript{49} His review of the installation was particularly potent because of his history as a proponent of the

\textsuperscript{46} Marstine, 18.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Carol Duncan, “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas,” \textit{Art Journal} 48, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 171
\textsuperscript{49} Saltz, “MoMA’s Sex Change.”
inclusion of more women artists in the museum’s permanent collection. He argued that MoMA, the Marron Atrium in particular, was a bastion of masculinity and Rist’s transformed it into a bright pink womb. In abstract terms, Saltz determined that Rist made “the institution ovulate.” Further to the point, Rist physically transformed the atrium with the addition of breast-shaped projectors seamlessly fixed to the walls. Furthermore, the subplot of *Pour Your Body Out* is to metaphysically induce a rush of femininity into the museum space. By the end of the film, the atrium is flooded in red because of a fluid projected onto the walls. One can assume that this is a metaphor for the menstrual cycle.

Because this installation was in an atrium where very few works by women have been shown, Rist’s work can be seen as a comment on misogyny. It is up for debate whether she did this on purpose or if it was purely coincidental. Nevertheless, Rist made an impact on the space to the degree that Saltz asserted that MoMA had gone through an, albeit temporary, sex change. It is noteworthy that, prior to the installation, Barnett Newman’s *Broken Obelisk* had been in this atrium. The fact that *Pour Your Body Out* replaced Newman’s obviously phallic-shaped work was a further testament to the theoretical sex change.

A second way that Rist controlled the feminization of space was in the addressing of the spectator as female, regardless of their gender. As mentioned earlier, Rist configured her videos so that the visitors could envision themselves in the place of the subject. The subject of the projected images is clearly female. In Teresa de Lauretis’s essay, “Strategies of Coherence: Narrative Cinema, Feminist Poetics, and Yvonne Rainer,” she outlined that one way that female

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
filmmakers could address the clear misogynistic bias in the film industry is by treating the viewer as though he were female. 54 Through the optical illusion of showing the body through point-of-view shots, Rist made the spectators imagine that they were the person on the screen. Because she was female, the male spectator imagined himself as female. In the same way that she feminized the space, Rist feminized her male spectators.

Conclusion

A recurrent and noticeable feature of contemporary art is a sophisticated combination of presentation and screen-based(cinematic effects. There is no place that this concept becomes clearer than in installation art. One particularly notable artist associated with this practice in installation art is Pipilotti Rist. Installation and screen-based projections become interrelated pieces of her work. In this way, Rist employs two-dimensional and three-dimensional modes of presentation—her projections and the spaces they inhabit. They become central and necessary as a mode of expressing notions of utopia and feminism.

54 De Lauretis, 125
Chapter 2: Doug Aitken and the Myth of Architectural Impenetrability: Glass Horizon and Sleepwalkers

Discourse surrounding the nature of architecture often revolves around the position of architecture in its environment and its relation to people. According to Sylvia Lavin, much of contemporary architectural discourse resides in the idea that architecture does not develop “adequate means of engagement.”\(^5^5\) This suggests that architecture has a difficult time engaging with a spectator, at least in a way that invites rather than dominates. Some artists have concerned themselves with the role of architecture and the ways in which architecture can be manipulated by installation art. Glass Horizon (1999-2000) was Aitken’s first experiment with working in architecture and exploring how the human body responds to the cityscape. In Sleepwalkers (2007), Doug Aitken questioned architectural function and examined the role architecture plays in the city it inhabits. In this chapter, I will explore how these two works reflect Aitken’s use of video and video projection, particularly in relation to its physical environment and to earlier forms of video art practice as well as contemporary developments in installation art.

Biography

Doug Aitken (b. 1968) was born in California and is now based in New York and Los Angeles. His work ranges from photographs, sculpture, what he calls “architectural interventions,” and video.\(^5^6\) An internationally recognized artist, Aitken participated in the Whitney Biennial in 1997 and earned the International Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999 for his installation Electric Earth (1999) (fig. 7).\(^5^7\) Glass Horizon (1999-2000) (fig. 8) was installed in 1999 at the Vienna Secession Hall and became one of Aitken’s very first architectural video installations.

\(^5^7\) Ibid.
works. The work *Sleepwalkers* (2007) (fig. 9) was installed at the Museum of Modern Art and, since then, Aitken continues to produce architectural video installations. Aitken’s recent sculptural works, his *Text Sculpture* (fig. 10) series, incorporates some elements of his video work, such as light boxes, but also integrates that with plant life and photography. 2012 has also been busy for Doug Aitken. His work this year includes his latest installation, a 360-degree installation on the façade of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculptural Garden in Washington, D.C (fig. 11). Also this year, Aitken renovated his house in Venice, California by using geological microphones and speakers that enhanced the sound of tectonic plate shifts, the roar of the tides, and the sound of traffic (fig. 12). He installed a sonic dining table, which can be played like a xylophone. This work can be seen as Aitken becoming more like Olafur Eliasson by bringing outdoor elements inside.

As Stephanie Cash notes, Aitken’s most memorable work is relatively intangible and engages the spectator in a bodily manner. That being said, Aitken’s video work calls attention to our perception. Because Aitken is from southern California and lives and works, even part-time, in Los Angeles, his work has often been accused of being “Hollywood,” due to his use of celebrities in many of his videos. While I agree that this could be a deterrent for many viewers, it opens up his work to a new audience who, by recognizing those faces, may be more inclined to watch. Secondly, for monumental works, it might be important for him to use people who are also larger than life.

Aitken and Rist are, in some ways, similar artists. They work in the same medium and integrate their work with architectural space. They are both interested in a phenomenological approach, or an experience-based method. Yet, the content of their work is quite different.

58 Ibid.
Rist’s work is often ephemeral, dream-like, and outlandish, whereas Aitken’s work tends to be mundane. Rist is often the actress in her work or she uses her assistants. Aitken, as previously stated, uses Hollywood actors and pop culture figures.

Aitken has stated in the past that he has an interest in organic approaches towards making art. He characterizes this in terms of “structures” of work that have connections, but are distinct. In this way, he views his own work as organism unto itself. Similar to Rist’s oeuvre, many works by Aitken are part of a trajectory. For example, the works Monsoon (1995) (fig. 13), Diamond Sea (1997) (fig. 14) and Eraser (1998) (fig. 15) deal with erosion and the slowness of time. Electric Earth and I am in you (2000) (fig. 16) advocate for engagement with the information age.

Both Rist and Aitken adopt organic approaches in terms of bodily perception in their work. I posit that these two artists emphasize a similar concept in very different ways. Whereas Rist concerns herself with the human body as a singular organism moving individually, Aitken is concerned with a collective organism or system of people. Also similar to Rist, there is an interest in the organic cycle of life. For Rist, this manifests itself in the literal life cycle, particularly for the female body as present in Pour Your Body Out. Aitken, on the other hand, is concerned with the cycle of nature in the cityscape—the sun comes up, the city comes alive, the sun goes down, and the city sleeps. In Charles Green’s essay, “The Memory Effect: Anachronism, Time and Motion,” the author commented on the role of time and memory in Aitken’s work. He noted that Aitken has the desire to create organic structures with his work, where every bit of information is important in a similar way to a strand of DNA. This notion of

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DNA cell structure as it relates to Aitken’s work could also be seen as a matrix, or an arrangement of collected things, which has a link to virtuality and contemporary technology.

Aitken and Rist belong to the generation of artists who came to prominence in the 1990s, around the time that the Internet came to prominence. Increasingly, our realities are entrenched with technologies and our modes of communication take place through a computer screen. The concept of virtual reality is not new; it relies on simulation, as painting and sculpture often do. Yet the concept of virtual reality taking over physical reality is becoming more inescapable. As Daniel Birnbaum states in his essay on Doug Aitken, we live in a world where “tele-presence and tele-robotics are no longer just the ingredients of science fiction novels or utopian visions but features of our everyday lives.”62 This is evidenced by how quickly we as a society turn to technology as a source of connection and information, such as our ability to access the news on a cell phone or contact people in different countries with one strike on a keyboard. Today, many artists critique this connection to the virtuality of our new reality through their use of tangible, physical objects. Aitken, like Rist, does not do this. Instead, he confronts that reality without prejudice, but as merely a fact of life. In Aitken’s work, technology exists as a mode of production, not as a source of critique. It is the medium, not the content. Connected with the notion of the natural cycle, Aitken interweaves nature, such as the sun cycle, with the things that destroy these cycles, such as the urban landscape and technology. In this way it seems that, from Aitken’s point of view, technology and modernity are not threatening to physical nature and are actually innocuous.

Like Rist, Aitken uses backlit images. Unlike LED signage and advertisements that emit light, film and video images are considered backlit because they are projected from behind the viewer and in their line of sight. In an interview with William Forsythe, Aitken states:

> A light source directed at the viewer [like LED signage] announces its presence and challenges you not to look away. In contrast, the projected image comes from the viewer’s general direction…It follows our gaze and…it envelops us instead of assaulting us.⁶³

Aitken suggests that backlit images are inviting rather than aggressive. His comments show that the artist is aware of the dynamics between virtual and physical reality that exists in screen-based works, perhaps another symptom of being a part of this generation of artists associated with the 1990s. As we increasingly rely on new technologies—computer screens, television, etc.—and it becomes more and more encompassing in our lives, the idea of a screen becomes more present. What I mean by this is that a screen, a physical barrier, gives the spectator an image that is readily accepted as reality, though it is not. By creating work that envelopes rather than confronts, Aitken, like Rist, is concerned with and has embraced virtual reality as another aspect of our physical reality.

In an essay on Aitken’s *Sleepwalkers*, Klaus Biesenbach noted that one of the guiding principles of video art during the 1990s, when both Aitken and Rist became popular, was the “loop,” a strategy that allowed for videos to be shown in durational periods of varying length.⁶⁴ This practice may be linked to the prominence of MTV and music video production, with its focus on short videos and required only a short attention span on the part of the viewer. Aitken, similar to musical video producers, typically makes short videos that run on a loop, allowing

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viewers to come and go without wondering what they might miss. Also, pop cultural interactions that rely on video—commercials, music videos, and other forms of digital media—are experienced as short narratives. Like Rist, Aitken exploits the structural parallel with the music video.

Rist is more attracted to nature (and as such, she infuses nature into architecture) while Aitken is primarily interested in the cityscape. It could be argued that Aitken, like Rist, brings nature into architecture, especially with a work like Migration (2008) (fig. 17), which consists of shots of animals roaming freely in hotels and other places typically inhabited by humans. However, I suggest that the city is central to Aitken’s work, with the sheer number of works he has created that revolve around the notion of city life.

**Glass Horizon, 1999-2000**

Aitken’s first foray into what he calls “architectural intervention,” Glass Horizon (1999-2000) was also one of Aitken’s most abstract works, due to its lack of narrative unlike most of his other videos. This work was installed on the façade of the Vienna Secession Building. Aitken projected a pair of eyes onto the building after it closed for the evening. The installation looks out over the Austrian capital and Biesenbach argued that this work connected the outside with the inside of the building.\(^{65}\) Literally, the building looked back at the people looking at it, in a manner closely related to Michel Foucault’s notion of the Panopticon. Peter Eleey, co-curator of later installations, notes that this work showed Aitken’s interest in architectural structures and the urban environment.\(^{66}\) While these statements are true and his interest in the

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\(^{65}\) Ibid.

urban environment and architecture are evident, it also shows his interest in infusing humanity and human physicality into an otherwise formidable and imposing building.

Not unlike Rist, with her use of images of the body projected onto an architectural space to make spectators more aware of their bodily perception, Aitken makes spectators more aware of their perceptions of the architectural space and their relation to it. Also, by projecting a human feature onto the building, Aitken reveals his interest in treating architecture as if it were a body. Architecture is often seen as nonnegotiable, but Aitken continuously challenges that and Glass Horizon will prove to be the first of many works in which he destabilizes our senses of architecture as a fixed and rigid structure.

Sleepwalkers, 2007

Sleepwalkers was conceived, produced, and realized for the outer walls of the Museum of Modern Art. Aitken began with a distinct idea. The artist wanted to create a work that could transform the existing architecture into a “moving and flowing space.” The installation features gigantic, “ghostlike” images projected onto the south and west sides of the museum’s façade. Unlike Glass Horizon however, Sleepwalkers had a narrative, though it was nonlinear. The storylines revolve around five different urbanites, beginning with their daily routine to their commute through New York City for work to a “more fictitious state of being that seems increasingly removed from reality.” In other words, our protagonists go from mundane scenes to scenes where there is no background and only abstract movements and actions. In the script for Sleepwalkers, Aitken wrote,

67 Ibid., 7.
69 Ibid., 9.
In *Sleepwalkers*, the city becomes a living breathing body merging with the diverse and constantly changing individuals who make up the city. The individuals in *Sleepwalkers*, in turn, move beyond their physical selves and are transformed by their surroundings. *Sleepwalkers* investigates the new and evolving relationships of contemporary urban life.  

Nothing is perhaps more urban than a large, modern building. By highlighting the nature of the relationships in the urban environment, in *Sleepwalkers* Aitken calls attention to the relationship between the city dweller and the architecture that surrounds them.

Because the building is u-shaped in the area where the work was shown and the nature of the projection itself, scenes and storylines are seen at least two at a time so they could be seen from any angle. These images were projected in the sculpture garden on 54th Street, the western end of the building (the side adjacent to the American Folk Art Museum), and on the 53rd Street side. Each film is thirteen minutes long and is recombined on different sides of the façade, so it produces different variations every time. From January 16th through February 12th, the work was on view from five o’clock to ten o’clock PM, shortly before the closing of the museum and after business hours.

The footage does not feature actual New Yorkers. Instead, Aitken chose actors and musicians for these unglamorous roles. This is characteristic of his work. Featured in the piece are actors Tilda Swinton as an office worker and Donald Sutherland as a businessman, musicians Seu Jorge as an electrician and Cat Power (born Chan Marshall) as a postal worker, and actor and musician Ryan Donowho as a bicycle messenger. Aitken regularly uses famous people in his videos. In general, as Cash comments, the use of big names enhances the “curb appeal” of

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70 Ibid., 6.
71 Cash, 105.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
the work. In other words, people stop for recognizable faces. However, the particularly recognizable faces of Tilda Swinton and Donald Sutherland were distracting for some spectators and upset the illusion that the people the viewers saw were actually a part of their own daily landscapes. The use of celebrities may also enhance our viewing of this installation because it shows that this is fiction and not documentary. The fact that it is fiction underscores a generalized idea and that what is shown can be about anyone’s life; it is not merely one person’s situation.

By affixing these images to a building in the heart of New York City, with the context of the images being the lives of New Yorkers, Aitken created an appropriate critique of city life. The actors start their days as night workers (though their jobs are actually daytime professions) and begin their jobs and other activities before the cycle starts again—a workday that seems slightly different and very much the same as the day before, not unlike real life. The actors were filmed at synchronous mundane moments and performing some of the same actions. These actions included walking, showering, drinking coffee, and staring out the window. Furthermore, some actions were not the same actions, but similar, as was in the case of Seu Jorge twirling a piece of electrical wire while another character twirls in a circle.

Sleepwalkers did not include sound. Aitken probably could not have included sound for a very obvious reason: who could hear it in a crowded place like New York City? Of course, this was also a nice gesture for people living nearby. It did not add to existing cacophony of the city. Perhaps for less practical and more aesthetic reasons, Aitken could have also been attempting to create another merger between the installation and the setting. As Stephanie Cash notes, the

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 106.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
noises of the city—the sound of a subway train screeching to a halt, car horns blaring—stood in for the Sleepwalkers soundtrack, blending effortlessly into the installation. This blending added another layer to the installation’s infiltration of the city. In this way, Sleepwalkers was a fairly subtle work. Unlike Pour Your Body Out, which was an installation aiming to create a relaxing atmosphere, Sleepwalkers was not creating atmosphere, nor was it challenging the existing atmosphere around the installation site. It merely existed in the atmosphere, which is inline with many other artists from his generation, who view technology as non-threatening and integral in our physical reality.

The size of the building and its orientation also lends itself to Aitken’s connection with the 1960s and 1970s experimental film trend of “expanded cinema.” According to Peter Eleey, expanded cinema relied on vertical rather than horizontal explorations that engaged atmosphere and states of being rather than unfolding a plot. MoMA’s façade is large and the area that the work was projected on was the most vertical part of the building. Effectively, by the use of the architecture itself, Aitken tapped into that tradition, but in a uniquely contemporary way. Aitken’s non-linear style also contributed to the expanded cinema notion.

Though the film was shot around the five boroughs that make up New York, each character is seen alone and in isolation. Even more so, each character is seen on separate parts of the building, separating the characters even further. As stated by Eleey,

Where we once found the exhilaration of communal experience in direct physical proximity to one another, we now increasingly seem content with a virtualized kind of

78 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 106.
social sublime—the sort of euphoria sold separately but consumed together.  

Aitken’s work reflected this in the structure of the installation. With each character being seen separately in their own scenes and separated on the building, yet being seen at the same time, *Sleepwalkers* creates the illusion of separation in a public place. Here is where Pipilotti Rist and Doug Aitken differ. While Rist is concerned with the communal experience within the space (which is in opposition to the work), Aitken is concerned with the isolation one may feel in a communal space. It is a very individual experience. The isolation of the characters spoke to the nature of New York City and many other large cities in the world. While being surrounded by people, the individual is often isolated and singular.

Another way that the installation reflected the nature of New York City was through the focus on the pedestrian. The pedestrian is the core of Aitken’s concept of New York because it privileges the walking experience of many, if not most, New York residents.  

As Walter Benjamin said in “On the Present Situation of Russian Film,” cinema corresponds to the life on the street. Because foot traffic is a major contributor to the overall city traffic, it could be said that Aitken was giving a nod to the pedestrians by creating a large-scale Cineplex that they could easily access. As Eleey again stated, the drive-in aspect of *Sleepwalkers* is a “walk-in, walk-by, walk-around, walk-through version of the theaters Manhattan never got.” This democratizes the experience in a way that Rist’s work could not. With *Pour Your Body Out*, as relaxed as it was, a viewer would still need to be well aware of the institutional space of contemporary art.

Yet, *Sleepwalkers* invited anyone to view it—from the art buff to someone who has never been

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 110.
84 Eleey, 115.
to a major art museum. Just as Aitken planned, because it is spread across the museum’s façade, it evoked the same kind of movement as a mass of pedestrians and transformed the architecture into something that imitated a living and breathing organism.

*The Façade of the Museum of Modern Art & its Contribution to the Work*

The Museum of Modern Art underwent several renovations in the early 2000s. The museum closed its doors in 2002 for its redesign by architect Yoshio Taniguchi and reopened on November 20, 2004, commemorating the museum’s 75th anniversary. MoMA’s renovation doubled the capacity of the former building, which increased the exhibition space from 85,000 to 125,000 square feet. The new building provides two new entrances and connects West 53rd and 54th streets.

It is important to note the materials of the façade are just as much a part of its architecture as its structure. As noted in many articles in reference to the new façade of MoMA, the façade is composed of “fritted, gray, and clear glass, absolute black granite, and aluminum panels.” These materials produce a highly reflective surface, making it the perfect “screen” for this project. As the critic Tom Vanderbilt has noted with reference to Aitken’s project, the artist is perhaps reaching back to Jacques Tati, who first suggested the implications of the “glass-curtain” wall on architecture and cinema in his monumental film, *Playtime* (1967). In the film, spectators were treated to a view of a “wilderness” of the window and reflective surfaces of modern architecture. The building facade served as both screen and lens, so much so that the

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
lead character in the film was unable to distinguish between the object and its reflection. Tati seemed to be hinting at the new transparency of modern architecture, which will become invaluable to Aitken’s mode of installation.

Architectural Function

One of the most interesting things that *Sleepwalkers* created was a critique of the function of an architectural space. The critique could be looked at in terms of what architectural spaces mean in general or what the museum space means in particular. Roberta Smith, in critiquing Aitken’s work, referred to this as “archivideo” or “videotecture.” In fact, Aitken’s video work, when done on a large scale, typically takes on an architectural quality. Advertently or inadvertently, Aitken’s architectural work often questioned the function of architectural spaces. One way that Aitken has done this with *Sleepwalkers* is through its projection onto the façade of the Museum of Modern Art, as opposed to the inside.

The façade of MoMA became an outdoor movie screen. It is of particular interest to note that Times Square is a ten-minute walk from MoMA, where similar “archivideo” can be seen on a commercial scale as advertisements. Aitken’s installation could be seen as the fine arts version of this aesthetic. However, instead of creating a kind of void like that of Times Square, *Sleepwalkers* alluded to the museum as an empty container due to its location within midtown Manhattan. This particular building has housed and conserved some of the world’s finest art and, with this work, Aitken dealt with the “cavernous complexity of midtown architecture’s enormous volume” simply because of its location. Gordon Matta-Clark, an artist who also

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90 Ibid., 15.
92 Ibid., E5.
93 Biesenbach, 51.
dealt with the complexity of architecture, may have called this “anarchitecture.” Anarchitecture was defined by Matta-Clark in the following terms:

Anarchitecture attempts to solve no problem but to rejoice in an informed, well-intended celebration of conditions that best describe and locate a place.\(^{94}\)

In other words, anarchitecture would apply to *Sleepwalkers* because of Aitken’s particular attention to the location of the work. Location, while not necessarily as central to the concept of the work as other aspects, plays a role in the installation in that midtown Manhattan resembles a filmstrip to Aitken.\(^{95}\) Indeed, the vertical lines of buildings and the semi-randomized highlights from office light fixtures create a grid pattern. If not in midtown, this installation may mean less.

The video reflected the building and MoMa and, in turn, the building’s enormity reflected the phenomenal aspect of the work itself. Biesenbach commented that images displayed on the inside and outside of buildings reflect what the building is meant to stand for.\(^{96}\) I am more concerned with the way *Sleepwalkers* reflected the building as an architectural force than I am with the building being the Museum of Modern Art. While the implication that *Sleepwalkers* reflects the institution is certainly evident, it is more interesting to think of it in terms of the complexity of large architectural structures.

Aitken created a drive-in theater out of the façade of MoMA, which is further enhanced by his recruitment of celebrities. The walls of MoMA were made into screens, but it suggests more about the building than the function itself. Architecture is meant to be sturdy and durable, yet, here, Aitken questioned that notion. By simulating a screen, Aitken suggested that a building could be permeable, not unlike Tati before him.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 51.
\(^{95}\) Aitken, 156.
\(^{96}\) Ibid., 39.
The City/Architecture as a Body

In a conversation with Doug Aitken, Melissa Plaut, a cab driver and writer in New York City, was asked if she ever viewed the city as a body. Plaut responded,

In the sense that it wakes up and goes to sleep, a kind of collective unconscious…It wakes up and then goes out and parties for the night and then it passes out at the end.97

This conversation was a glimpse into Aitken’s interest in thinking of architecture in terms of the human condition, but more specifically, in terms of the human body. Plaut and Aitken discussed the city in terms of its movement and fluidity. In the script of Sleepwalkers, Aitken wrote about the city in similar terms.

This is a city that resembles the human body in every way, from the sidewalks, Internet cables, and subway tunnels that are its veins, to the people and vehicles, fueled by gasoline, coffee, and alcohol, that surge through those veins like blood. The city’s heart pulses to the rhythm of the street noise and flashing traffic lights, but it’s the mind that drives everything. The city’s visceral human nature—its passion, violence, and lust—is obsessed with time as the city, like the body, constantly replenishes itself. The city lives nowhere more strongly than the present.98

Through his description of the city as a body, with all the parts of the city playing vital roles as bodily organs, Aitken has neglected to give a role to architecture. I posit that architecture is the face of the city. It is the most prominent feature on the city landscape and defines what kind of city we inhabit, much like the face functions for the human body. Furthermore, through Sleepwalkers, Aitken has given the hypothetical face an actual face by projecting the human image onto its façade. Though the installation did not depict actual New Yorkers, they did possess the same quality as the city. By waking up at night and working

97 Doug Aitken, “The City as a Body,” 68.
during the midnight hours, the characters embodied “the city that never sleeps,” further identifying the city through installation and architecture.

**Conclusion**

Doug Aitken began his “architectural intervention” style work in the late 1990s and early 2000s with *Glass Pavilion*. With this installation, Aitken explored the potential for architecture, projected images, and the human body to merge. In January 2007, less than a decade after *Glass Pavilion*, *Sleepwalkers* was installed on the façade of MoMA. The installation embodied what architect Heige Mooshammer posited as “the rededication of a landscape through imagination and projection.”99 The Museum of Modern Art and this installation interacted in a way where the nature of both the architecture of the museum and the genre of video installation influenced one another and were altered to fit one another’s needs. Video installation was brought to new heights, literally due to the sheer size of the projections. The architecture of MoMA was envisioned as movie screen. Furthermore, the function of the museum was altered in less aesthetic and more practical ways. By displaying these images shortly before and well after the regular business hours of the institution and for free, Aitken opened the museum to a different kind of spectatorship that was also self-referential in that a very human story was being told to us and a film very much invested in the structural and architectural presence of the city was being projected directly onto those architectural structures. In conclusion, Aitken in *Sleepwalkers* particularly highlights the undeniable link between installation art and architecture. His screen aesthetics, like Rist’s, are designed in a subtle yet effective way, to heighten our awareness of the imbrication of virtual and physical realities in the contemporary world and open new ways of imagining that relationship.

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99 Biesenbach, 52.
Chapter Three: Olafur Eliasson’s Screen Aesthetics and the Politics of Perception

Introduction

Installation art has the ability to combine elements of different forms of artistic expression while incorporating architecture and design. Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) is an artist who works in this tradition, combining protocinematic techniques with a concern for architecture which transitions the focus of the work from the work itself to modes of perception and, ultimately, the viewer. Eliasson creates a sort of tableau in his work, including a focus on creating illusions and the use of light as a source and as a medium. In this chapter, I am going to explore the eighteenth-century phantasmagoria as it relates to Eliasson’s tendencies as an artist. I will consider how he integrates elements of the cinematic tradition in his own work through the use of screen aesthetics. I am also going to consider both the art-historical traditions relating to the aspects of Light and Space Art that are important to Eliasson, as well as the distinctively contemporary sensibility that he brings to this tradition. Lastly, I will compare Eliasson to Rist and Aitken in terms of how each artist deals with perception and the complex idea of work that is both physical and virtual.

Biography

Olafur Eliasson was born in Copenhagen, Denmark and now works and lives in Berlin. From 1989 to 1995, he studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. The artist had his first solo show in Copenhagen in 1994 at Stalke Out of Space, a gallery known for its experimental shows in the early and mid-1990s. Eliasson is what most would consider an art celebrity, a status cemented by both his artistic and commercial success. Eliasson’s most widely known work is The Weather Project (fig. 18), which was installed in the Tate Turbine Hall from
October 16, 2003 to March 21, 2004. This seemed to be the point that highlights the artist’s artistic success, but commercial success followed with his project *Eye See You* (2006) (fig. 19) for Louis Vuitton. His work is internationally recognized and has been exhibited in major museums and galleries all over the world.

His particular outlook on art begins with the belief that art can be the catalyst through which the society can be examined, challenged, and renegotiated. He believes that cultural practices like art are not only driven by capitalistic values, but operate through ideas that ultimately define subjectivity. While Eliasson has several sources of inspiration, it is of particular interest to this study that “utopian architects” influence the artist. His own work tackles the same issues as the work of architects like Cedric Price and Yona Friedman, who are also interested in open-ended, ephemeral operations of architecture. In particular, Einar Thorstein, with whom Eliasson worked in 1996 on his project *By means of a sudden intuitive realization, show me your perception of presence* (fig. 20), has influenced the artist greatly.

Both artist and architect are concerned with the decentralization of the objective art space and the dematerialization of the art object. According to Eliasson,

> This is why I like most utopian architects and thinkers: they’ve got that ability to think about their own vision from the outside. I’m…getting more involved in works integrated into spatial projects, but involving them more into my own work as well.

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101 Olafur Eliasson, *Your Engagement has Consequences* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Muller Publisher, 2006), 11.
102 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 3.
Eliasson also has an interest in color. Not only is he concerned with color itself, but also how it is perceived or received. This interest has lead to many conversations with the artist revolving around color. Particularly, the artist finds the potential of white—off-white, eggshell, and any other variation of the color—particularly interesting, believing that white has the potential to transform things around it. Overall, Eliasson believes in critical engagement with the work.

Therefore what we must do is challenge the ways in which we engage with our surroundings, and here, I believe art has a great potential; it not only encourages critical engagement, but also introduces a sense of responsibility.

Color for Eliasson is never concrete or “self-evident.” His more subtle elaborations on this aspect of his work are explorations of the gap between color presentation and representation.

Similarly to Aitken and Rist, there is a bodily element in his work. This bodily element seems to be more closely related to Rist’s vision of the human body than Aitken’s. For Aitken, the body is little more than a framework for the cityscape and a catalyst for architectural intervention. For Rist and Eliasson, the bodily experience is tactile, physical, and the work is very much about the act of bodily perception. Eliasson, for his part, has a very tangible sense of perception—that is to say that he makes works that highlight the tangible nature of very intangible things—, which even Rist has not done. I contend that Eliasson’s work is more invested in notions of experience than Rist’s or Aitken’s because of his particular scientific attention to the way the body perceives its surroundings.

105 Eliasson, *Your Engagement has Consequences*, 247.
106 Ibid., 11.
Like Rist and Aitken, Eliasson comes from a generation of artists that came to prominence during the 1990s, when virtual reality became an integral part of our physical reality. All three artists confront this notion without hostility, integrating virtuality in a way that it becomes innocuous. This may be especially true of Eliasson’s work because of use of the virtual space is subtle.

**Eliasson and the Phantasmagoria**

The history of illuminated images and projection can be traced back to the 1780s with the popularity of the phantasmagoria, a kind of light show invented by physicists and magicians. At the height of its popularity, many referred to it as a “hallucinatory spectacle.” The phantasmagoria produced illuminated images, typically skeletons and ghosts, by the use of a modified magic lantern (another late 18th century invention). The images were mostly animated and mobile, which was key in terrifying 18th and 19th century spectators not accustomed to “pictorial assaults.” These images were projected onto a canvas screen or, not as often, onto smoke. The phantasmagoria, which set the precedent for the modern cinema, operated on very few guiding principles, but the most important of these principles was that the spectator should never see the projector.

Eliasson’s interest in light, color, and projection are an offshoot of the phantasmagoria and the cultural phenomenon that resulted from it. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on the ideas of illusion and perception. The phantasmagorists wanted the audience to believe that they were seeing ghostly likenesses and the terrifying scenes that we would relate with horror films. Eliasson, on the other hand, intends with every work for the audience to question their perceptions of space and color. While the mechanism and the images each side aspired to

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109 Ibid.
produce are different, the intention remains the same. Secondly, the phantasmagoria produced scenes that are simulated, or virtual, in a physical setting. Eliasson also has does this, but with a contemporary sensibility that is characteristic of his generation of artists.

The phantasmagoria was the first attempt, in hindsight, at cinema, but most importantly, it was one of the first attempts at creating an atmosphere in which spectators would question their own perceptions. In this way, the phantasmagoria is highly phenomenological. However, some of the principles of the phantasmagoria do not translate. Eliasson, like Rist and Aitken, is not seeking to hide the mechanics behind his work. By hiding the projector, the phantasmagorists made an attempt to, implicitly, deceive the viewer. Eliasson, Rist, and Aitken do not hide the apparatuses that they use. While Rist and Aitken’s mechanics are often neatly installed into the space somehow, though not out of view, Eliasson often makes the mechanics of his work quite prominent.

The phantasmagoria is an example of how screen aesthetics does not always equate with screen use. While most phantasmagoric images were projected onto the traditional canvas screens (perhaps as an extension of the painting tradition), some were projected onto a curtain of smoke.\textsuperscript{110} This implies that the focus is not to use a screen, but to have the work be mediated in so much that it could have projected onto anything so long as there is something between the spectator and the work. Similarly, Eliasson, unlike Rist and Aitken, applies nontraditional screen aesthetics to his work. Regardless, they maintain a similar cinematic effect. Furthermore, as suggested by Kate Mondloch, screen-based viewing predates the invention of still or moving images, as in the case of cave paintings.\textsuperscript{111} This suggests that screen-based viewing does not also

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Kate Mondloch, \textit{Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minesota Press, 2010), xi.
equate moving images. Mondloch notes that contemporary screen-based representations are merely the next chapter in this genre of work, but I would also suggest that this leaves room for more experimental and radical ways of thinking about what a screen can be. It is important to note here that, not unlike the phantasmagoria, Eliasson combines virtual space with actual space. This work thus has a link to the centuries-old phantasmagoria; it is also linked to a very contemporary world where our physical lives are becoming more virtual every day.

**Eliasson and the Phantasmagoria: Beauty, 1993**

One work that is particularly pertinent to the idea of the phantasmagoria is *Beauty* (1993) (fig. 21). In a gallery space, a perforated hose that dripped a curtain of water was installed. A lamp then sent rays of light towards the water to produce a rainbow. Like the phantasmagorists before him, Eliasson created an illusion in the gallery space. For the phantasmagorists, this meant creating images of ghosts that were lifelike. In this work, a rainbow should not be able to be reproduced in a room as it would in nature. The rainbow is, in essence, an illusion that harkens back to Eliasson’s interest in producing a virtual image in a physical space. Much of Eliasson’s work relies on the notion of bringing the outside in. In other words, Eliasson often focuses on the reproducibility of nature indoors. Rist is also interested in this, but Eliasson’s *Beauty* does this in a way that Rist has never actually attempted.

As mentioned, Eliasson does not hide the mechanics of his work by disguising them. He, instead, leaves them exposed. In *Beauty*, the lamp and the hose are in clear view. The installation does not leave the spectator guessing as to how he was able to create the illusion, but, in fact, shows them exactly how it was done. According to Mannoni and Brewster, many phantasmagorists and later generations of filmmakers, such as Georges Méliés, believed that
letting the spectator know the tricks of the trade would undermine the illusion.\textsuperscript{112} I posit that, in Eliasson’s case, revealing the mechanics does not undermine the illusion so much as it highlights his mastery of technology.

\textbf{The Cinematic Tradition}

Eliasson cinematism is not wholly rooted in the phantasmagoria, but also in later cinematic traditions, particularly in experimental cinema of the 1920s. Olafur Eliasson does not create work using moving images. Yet, as previously noted, Eliasson is an artist interested in the cinematic. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, \textit{cinematic} is derived from the French word \textit{cinematique}, meaning “the geometry of motion.”\textsuperscript{113} As Biesenbach and Marcoci have argued, Eliasson’s work involves spatially transformative works that involve geometry as well as optics and convey a sense of filmic event or narrative.\textsuperscript{114} Most importantly, however, it must be noted that though the term “cinema” is used interchangeably with the word “film,” these two things are not the same. Film is a medium, whereas cinema is a social institution—it is where people go to have a communal experience. Though Eliasson does not use film, it cannot be said that he does not have the cinematic tradition in mind. In a uniquely contemporary way, however, Eliasson combines virtual space and actual space that give a contemporary spin on an older tradition of cinema.

In his protocinematic vision, Eliasson pays homage to Moholy-Nagy. Many of Moholy-Nagy’s films had a particular focus on aesthetic experimentation with light sources and “the social potential of visual agency.”\textsuperscript{115} This is also central to Eliasson in terms of how light can

\textsuperscript{112} Mannoni and Brewster, 409.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 184.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 185.
affect perception. Since the 1990s, Eliasson has created hundreds of light installations, sculptures, and photographs that take the viewer’s attention away from the object and toward the process of perception.

Finally, early cinematic traditions sought out new ways of seeing or perceiving. Likewise, Eliasson makes it part of his mission as an artist to affect the ways that his viewers perceive by purposefully calling attention to the process of seeing. Made in collaboration with Luc Steels, the work *Look into the box* (2002) (fig. 22), seeks to articulate the act of seeing.\(^{116}\) As part of the installation the viewer looks into the lens of a camera placed inside a box. The camera takes a snapshot, which is then projected as a still onto one of the walls on the gallery. The installation raised questions about what it meant to see oneself in the act of seeing. As Biesenbach and Marcoci wrote, “this…exercise emphasizes both the artist’s and the viewer’s active, critical roles in the process of perception.”\(^{117}\) This projection is analogous with the terms set forth by French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, who described the ultimate movie “as the camera filming itself in the mirror.”\(^{118}\) This installation also nodded to El Lissitzky. In the autobiographical typescript form 1928, titled “The Films of El’s Life,” the artist wrote

> My eyes. Lenses and eyepieces, precision instruments and reflex cameras, cinematographs, which magnify or hold split seconds. Roentgen and X, Y, Z have all combined to place in my forehead 20, 2,000, 200,000 very sharp polished eyes.\(^{119}\)

Here, Lissitzky’s “self-portrait” is a metaphor for the creative process and an equation of the mechanism of human perception with the lens of the camera.\(^{120}\)

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\(^{116}\) Ibid., 187.
\(^{117}\) Ibid.
\(^{118}\) Ibid.
\(^{119}\) Ibid.
\(^{120}\) Ibid.
himself with the critical assessment of perception in the cinematic tradition of early 20th century artists. Perhaps most importantly, Eliasson engages in screen aesthetics, recognizing the screen as a vehicle for perception that renders the viewer both passive and active.

**The Cinematic Tradition: *Remagine, 2002***

A work most recognizable as tapping into the potential of experimental cinema from the 1920s is *Remagine* (2002) (fig. 23). In *Remagine*, Eliasson explored the geometry of perspective, a basic principle of pictorial composition. Here, Eliasson reminded the viewer of the “artificial underpinnings” of perspective on a two-dimensional plane.\(^{121}\) This is to say that perspective aims to create the illusion that what one is seeing has depth, when depth is impossible in a flat object. Installed at eye level on one side of the gallery, theater lamps project various squares, trapezoids, and rectangles onto the opposite wall. A computer program connected to the lamps choreographed the movement of these shapes in white light that appeared and disappeared, strengthening in frequency and intensity with time.\(^{122}\) The shapes floated freely, superimposed onto one another.

*Remagine* can be seen as another attempt to create a virtual space in a physical space. The idea that depth can be displayed on a two-dimensional plane suggests virtuality and simulation simply because it cannot actually be done, though it appears real. Similar to how a computer screen can simulate a real landscape, *Remagine* displays the same intention.

*Remagine* has similar principles to a series of films by Hans Richter called *Rhythmus 21* (1923). In these films, rectangles and squares were seen, sometimes in pairs or groupings, crossing the screen at different speeds. Some of the shapes are white, while others border on dark gray. The structural likeness of the two works is uncanny. Both artists were exploring

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\(^{121}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 16.
depth on a two-dimensional plane and the use of the same shapes makes for an obvious comparison. Similar to *Rhythmus*, *Remagine* maintained a certain rhythm within the work, as the shapes seemed to pulsate back and forth, from on “screen” to off. Because of this link, Eliasson established a point of comparison with Rist and Aitken. Each artist taps into a facet of cinematic tradition. Rist employs some of the same aesthetics of feminist filmmaking, Aitken rehashes Hollywood aesthetics, and Eliasson reaches further back than either artist—to the 1920s and even earlier.

**Light and Space Art**

As Bal has noted, light takes precedence in Eliasson’s work, not as the opposite of materiality, but so the viewer may experience the very materiality of light in order to enable the viewers’ appreciation of that materiality.\(^{123}\) His work can be associated with that of the Light artists of 1960s California. Eliasson’s relation to Robert Irwin is apparent. An interest in pushing the boundaries of art and perception is key to either artist production. Furthermore, the effect of California on Light and Space art in general cannot be ignored.\(^{124}\)

In Annelie Lutgens’ article “Twentieth-Century Light and Space Art,” she, with reference to Eliasson, discussed light on two different levels: the technical and physical level or the spiritual and metaphysical level.\(^{125}\) Early twentieth-century artists explored both ways in which light is viewed and have frequently combined them in their work. Using light in their work was made particularly possible in the twentieth century and today by the invention of the electric light. This is not to say that twentieth century artists were the first to do this. On the contrary, prior to Edison’s perfection of the modern light bulb in 1879, artists used fire, torches, candles, lamps...

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\(^{123}\) Bal, 168.  
oil, gas lamps, and, of course, the sun as a way to exploit the effects of light in their work.\textsuperscript{126}

Artists like Caravaggio, Georges de la Tour, and Rembrandt were particularly fascinated by the way light could affect art and perception. Van Gogh, Picasso, and Degas were amongst the first artists to use artificial light as a means and a material—not only a motif. After World War I, artists seeking to create a new social role for the art found exciting and new ways to use light, including artists like Moholy-Nagy. The fundamental elements of Light and Space Art of the late twentieth century, as defined by Lutgens are: space and movement; perception; experimental machinery; and activating the viewer.\textsuperscript{127} Lutgens believed that Eliasson uses some of these elements in his own work in combination to accent and question modes of perception.

\textit{Perception}

As Lutgens shows, perception as it relates to space and light art, in Eliasson’s art, is present in the constantly changing kinetic shapes and lights that call for active, dynamic perception focusing on “simultaneity and difference.”\textsuperscript{128} Perception is perhaps the strongest element in Eliasson’s work. Take for example Eliasson’s Room for one colour (1997) (fig. 24).

\textit{Room for one colour} was a space completely devoid of objects, but bathed in yellow light emanating from a ceiling bank of monofrequency bulbs.\textsuperscript{129} As a part of a later exhibition called \textit{Take Your Time}, it was exhibited in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and, subsequently, at the Museum of Modern Art in 2008. The entire space was coated in a thick yellow hue, but perhaps more importantly, the inhabitants of the space were surrounded in the color as well. As Madeleine Grynsztejn has pointed out, at the same time that the viewer

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
perceived the color yellow, he was also neurologically experiencing and compensating for the
absence of every other color.\textsuperscript{130} As a result, the audience experienced the rest of the galleries
differently. The adjacent galleries glowed with a deep purple—yellow’s opposite and
afterimage—though the walls were actually white.\textsuperscript{131} Eliasson thus made the spectator’s retinal
process part of the aesthetic equation.\textsuperscript{132} By making the spectator’s process of perception bend
to his will, he opened the space of his work to the reproductive working of human visual
perception.

Eliasson’s emphasis on active corporeal vision is only one of the means in which he uses
models of perception to limit sight and insight. His work often takes on illusionistic tools that
have been a part of art history since the Renaissance, such as Albertian one-point perspective,
Euclidian geometry, and Cartesian coordinate systems.\textsuperscript{133} All of these principles create an optic
relationship between the viewer and the viewed. In other words, by drawing attention to the
conventions of seeing, he encouraged critical thought regarding perception of space.

\emph{Experimental Machinery}

Experimental machinery is central to the artist’s work in implementing the new type of
perception mentioned in the above section. The artist acts as a director, staging situations with
space and light.\textsuperscript{134} The machinery the artist uses may be a part of the staging if he so chooses. It
is also important to note that Eliasson often thinks of his own work as a machine or tool through
which he can create a phenomenon. In a conversation between Eliasson and Aitken, Eliasson

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{134} Lutgens, 34.
mentioned that his work was a tool for experiencing “yourself from an external point of view.” In this way, the entire work for Eliasson is experimental machine through which the human perspective can be isolated and highlighted.

It should be noted here that Eliasson never hides the technology or machinery behind his work. Projectors are often out in the open, where the spectator will notice them, and light bulbs remain uncovered. This is to say that his technique is not even thinly veiled as much as it is made a part of the installation. His most famous work, The Weather Project, had exposed light fixtures, so viewers could not say that the sun he installed in the Tate Turbine Hall was anything more than artificial light. Similarly, Remagine had an exposed bank of theatre lights opposite of where the projection landed—thus, positioned behind the viewer, but not out of sight.

Activating the Viewer

This use of space and light art helps to explain Eliasson’s purpose in working in this tradition. Ultimately, as Lutgens notes, the artist’s aim is to involve the viewer. Lutgens wrote that this meant stimulating within the viewer a process of recognition and understanding. The process of recognition and understanding challenges the intellectual and emotional sides of the viewer’s perception. In other words, the process of acknowledging the art and understanding it affects the viewer’s thoughts and feelings.

Returning to the example of Room for one colour, Eliasson also demonstrated his interest in encouraging participation on the part of the viewer. In taking particular consideration for the role of retinal perception of the viewer, Eliasson interweaved the body of the spectator with the

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135 Aitken, 110.
136 Grynsztejn, 17.
137 Lutgens, 34.
138 Ibid., 34.
room—the external events with the internal sensations. The work of art itself became the “interface between site and subject and an emergent property of both.” In other words, the work of art became a site for interaction between the architecture and the spectator and emerged from this interaction as something more than either of them. It became something that was at once both site and subject. Grynsztejn here recalls Maurice Merleau-Ponty writings on perception as it relates to interaction with the viewer,

The properties of the object and the intentions of the subject...are not only intermingled; they also constitute a new whole...It is impossible to say ‘which started first’ in the exchange of stimuli and response.

Similarly, Room for one colour showed that the substance of experience is not prescribed, but instead it is performed from moment to moment between the viewer and the environment. This was a demonstration of a “perceiver-dependent” world and proof of the human capacity to “influence what influences us.” Just as Aitken’s work showed the ways that our story could be reflected back to us, Eliasson often shows how we can influence what we perceive. In reference to the idea of the “perceiver-dependent” world, Eliasson said,

And the idea that you as perceiver become a producer is the key issue here. You project your feelings onto your surroundings—this is how you relate to them.

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139 Merleau-Ponty, cited in Grynsztejn, 15.
140 Ibid., 15.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
In the context of installation, the perceiver was no longer a “disembodied optical surveyor…but [was] instead the producer of optical sensation.”\textsuperscript{144} In forcing the viewer to change their perspective, Eliasson reminded viewers that they are actively contributing to the experience of the work. In this way, the work ceased to be endless because, with each viewer, the reading and the experience were “nailed down” to one subjective condition—the interaction between the work and the viewer.

As Bal notes, “second-personhood” is at the heart of Eliasson’s creative process.\textsuperscript{145} She argues that, instead of exploiting the sublimity of Light Art, which could be received as one sided (i.e. the work speaks to the viewer, but the viewer never speaks back), his work is largely communicative. This is to say that the work does not focus on the introspective “I,” but on addressing the viewer as “you.” Secondly, the way the viewer perceives the work is wholly connected to the work itself. Each viewer should, in this context, view the work differently.

According to Lutgens, when Eliasson uses light, air, and water as artistic materials, “he confronts us with the precious resources necessary to our existence on Earth,” which allows us to perceive, experience, and see them as we see ourselves.\textsuperscript{146} His use of light, air, and water is reflexive. When we see his work, we are meant to see ourselves, as these are the elements in which our existence comes to be. Light is of particular importance to his work. As illuminating light, it allowed the viewer to discern the imaginary contours of a square in a room full of steam (\(1 \text{ m}^3 \text{ light}, \text{ 1999}\)) (fig. 25).\textsuperscript{147} Even more so, as a strobe light, light transformed a wall of artificial rain into, as Lutgens described it, “a glittering ‘curtain of pearls’” in the work \textit{Your}

\textsuperscript{145} Bal, 169.
\textsuperscript{146} Lutgens, 33.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 32.
strange uncertainty still kept (1996) (fig. 26). As self-light, the work envelops the viewer—as in Room for One Color, where monochrome light bathes everything in sight in yellow. In terms of light, Eliasson uses light to create installations that revolve around imagined or real space, which demonstrate physical processes. Secondly, his use of light produces an atmospheric space that appeals to the “subjective experience” of the viewer. For these reasons, Eliasson follows the tradition of artists from the early twentieth century dealing with light and space.

**Light and Space Art and Perception: Your Colour Memory, 2004**

Eliasson’s entire oeuvre can be used as indication of his interest in light, space, and perception, particularly the work with color. However, I will use *Your Colour Memory* (2004) (fig. 27) as an example of this preoccupation with light, space, and perception.

This work was installed in the Arcadia University Art Gallery in 2004. It is one of several pieces by Eliasson that features a luminous display in a curvilinear construction. The colors faded in and out at timed intervals. In a general sense, Eliasson is working in a panoramic tradition in this installation, which is not a far cry from the phantasmagoria. According to Jonathan Crary, the artist’s use of a panorama in this work was, in part, an attempt to “reaffirm and reclaim the corporal features of human vision.” Similar to many of his other works, this work called attention to the link between viewer and viewed. As Crary indicated, *Your Colour Memory* created a situation where our optical system made the spectator question the objectivity of viewing. Because the hues shifted periodically, spectators were not given a chance to truly

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148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid., 32-33.
151 Ibid., 33.
152 Jonathan Crary, “Illuminations of the Unforeseen,” in *Your Colour Memory* by Olafur Eliasson et. al. (Glenside, PA: Arcadia University, 2006), 18.
adapt to one color. Also, because they were introduced to one color after another, the way they experienced a following color changed due to the afterimage produced by the color before it.

**Inspiration: Architectural Link**

Eliasson’s work takes on a spatial quality that involves an ephemeral reworking of space. He does not change the architecture of a building, as that would be either impossible or very difficult to do without compromising the building itself. After all, he is not Gordon Matta-Clark. Instead, he transforms the building with visual effects that directly influence the perception of the building. In this way, the architectural form of the space is very important to Eliasson because it directly influences his work. Not only does Eliasson draw from architects in particular, but from architecture as a science.

The whole field of architecture is changing fast and that really inspires me. Artistic practice has rediscovered its ability to constantly redefine its own programme [sic], and architectural discourse has opened up to other fields in the same way. This is why the fact of integrating architects…is crucial to me in opening up to other ways of working.¹⁵³

Eliasson’s investigation of space and design, ongoing and ever present in his work, began with his idea that the studio is a laboratory that generates, in the artist’s words, “interdisciplinary dialogues between art and its surroundings, an example being architecture.”¹⁵⁴ In Eliasson’s work, the dialogue between art and architecture is often practiced along the surfaces of the building. This is further highlighted by the fact that many of installations are constructed sites. *Your Colour Memory* and *The Weather Project* are all constructed architectural sites within existing architecture. Though Rist and Aitken have shown awareness of architectural space,

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3.
Eliasson actually builds or reconstructs the environment, rather than having his viewers imagine it.

**Conclusion**

Olafur Eliasson works in a multiplicity of disciplines and has been able to incorporate them evenly within each work. Eliasson is concerned with the role of the viewer and he encourages the viewer’s active participation and engagement. He uses light and space as key materials to call upon spectators to critically assess what it means to see. Eliasson is attuned to contemporary practice of treating light, space, and architecture as sculpture: the three-dimensional space doubles as an imaginary space within a real space. Like Pipilotti Rist and Doug Aitken, Eliasson comes from a generation where the virtual space is not treated with antagonism, but is instead, treated as a part of our physical reality.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored the work of Pipilotti Rist, Doug Aitken, and Olafur Eliasson. While I have explored the work of these artists in general, I have also chosen specific works that I find to be strongly characteristic of aspects shared by all three—the focus on virtual space in physical space, the treatment of technology not as threatening but as a part of our daily lives, and a focus on bodily perception. Though these artists’ concerns differ in many ways, they have a similar viewpoint of the world we live in, where the screen and virtual reality are more a part of our physical lives every day. This thesis was written from a broadly phenomenological approach, emphasizing modes of physical perception as key to their artistic production.

In Chapter One, I discussed the work of Pipilotti Rist and focused primarily on the work *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*. Rist creates color-rich video installations that are reminiscent of 1960s psychedelic popular culture iconography. I have argued that Rist is characteristic of a certain shift in contemporary installation art, as described by Alex Potts, that focuses on staging and display as essential to the substance of the work. I argued in this chapter that Rist makes installation and screen-based projection central to her work because of an interest in creating work that engages the spectator physically in real space, yet opens a virtual space in the process.

In Chapter Two, I explored related themes with regard to the work of Doug Aitken. I touched on significant parts of his oeuvre, including sculptural works, but focused on his video installations that were meant for the facades of large institutions. Narrowing down my research, I focused on *Glass Horizon* and *Sleepwalkers*. I found that these two works were characteristic of Aitken’s “architectural interventions,” in that these works emphasized the bodily perception of architectural space. While Rist uses a more ephemeral, psychedelic aesthetic to her video
installations, Aitken presents mundane images, evoking every day life. He approaches his videos in an even more democratic way by projecting these images onto the outside of a building. I argued in this chapter that the highlighted works reflect Aitken’s use of video and video projection in reference to its physical environment and that this tendency has a link to the question of how virtual and physical space interact.

In Chapter Three, I examined issues of virtuality, physicality, and environment in the work of Olafur Eliasson. I connected him to the eighteenth-century practice of protocinematic, illusionistic effects linked to the notion of the phantasmagoria. Eliasson’s work with light also lends itself to this aesthetic practice, but he also shares similarities with early twentieth-century experimental film. I emphasized Your Colour Memory, Remagine, and Beauty as works connected to physical perception, virtuality, and screen aesthetics. While he is not often considered an artist who produces screen-based work, I posited that the use of screen-based aesthetics is central to understanding his work. I compared him to Rist and Aitken and argued that Eliasson actually emphasizes bodily perception with a more scientific, programmatic approach than Rist or Aitken.

In my introduction, I noted that this thesis is significant because these artists are not often compared to one another. I also believe that Eliasson is rarely thought of as an artist whose work takes on a virtual presence, though this is apparent. I think that this research could be further studied and applied to other installation-based artists, such as Eija-Liisa Ahtila and her contemporaries, to show that this is not just characteristic of the artists in this study, but many artists from this generation.

Rist, Aitken, and Eliasson share an awareness of the uncertainty about our place in the world, where virtuality is a prominent feature of our physical reality. By exposing modes of
physical perception, these artists display their uniquely contemporary sensibilities in regard to virtual and physical realities.
Articles


Books/Chapters of Books


Eliasson, Olafur. *Your Engagement has Consequences*. Baden, Switzerland: Lars Muller Publisher, 2006.


**Web Resources**


Fig. 1: Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, 2008, video/mixed media installation, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 2: Rist, Still from *Pepperminta*, 2009
Fig. 3: Rist, *Ever is Overall*, 1997, video installation, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Fig. 4: Rist, *Sip My Ocean*, 1996, video installation, Musée de Beaux-Arts de Montreal (installation view, 2000)

Fig. 5: Rist, *Blutclip*, 1993, video
Fig. 6: Rist, *Gravity Be My Friend*, 2007, Magasin 3 in Stockholm Konsthall, Stockholm.
Fig. 7: Doug Aitken, *Electric Earth*, 1999, video installation

Fig. 8: Aitken, *Glass Horizon*, 1999-2000, video installation
Fig. 9: Aitken, *Sleepwalkers*, 2007, video installation, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Fig. 10: Aitken, *Text Sculpture* series, 2011, light box
Fig. 11: Aitken, Hirshhorn Installation (or Song I), 2012
Fig. 12: Aitken, Venice Home (or *Acid Modernism*), 2012, multimedia installation
Fig. 13: Aitken, *Monsoon*, 1995, video, production still
Fig. 14: Aitken, *Diamond Sea*, 1997, video installation
Fig. 15: Aitken, *Eraser*, 1999, video installation
Fig. 16: Aitken, *I am in you*, 2000, video installation
Fig. 17: Aitken, *Migration*, 2008, video installation
Fig. 18: Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2003, multimedia installation, Tate Turbine Hall, London, UK
Fig. 19: Eliasson, *Eye See You*, 2006, lamp, commissioned by Louis Vuitton

Fig. 20: Eliasson, *By means of a sudden intuitive realization, show me your perception of presence*, 1996, multimedia installation, Tonya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.
Fig. 21: Eliasson, *Beauty*, 1993, water, tubing, and lamp.
Fig. 22: Eliasson, *Look into the Box*, 2002, video/photographic installation

Fig. 23: Eliasson, *Remagine*, 2002, multimedia installation
Fig. 24: Eliasson, *Room For One Colour*, yellow monofrequency lights
Fig. 25: Eliasson, \(1 \text{ m}^3\) light, 1999, lamps
Fig. 26: Eliasson, *Your Strange Uncertainty Still Kept*, water, strobe lights, acrylic, foil, wood, hose
Fig. 27: Eliasson, *Your Colour Memory*, 2004, multimedia installation