Intimate immensity

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Intimate Immensity

by

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Henrik Søderstrøm
Intimate Immensity, 2011
reclaimed wood, copper, bronze, iron, steel,
pastel, acrylic, plaster, stoneware, yarn, & sinew
Giving up the need for a concrete image in order to multiply possibilities

Giving up the need to control space by filling it with imagery or sound in order to give a voice to what is already there

Giving up the clarity of a single ruling object in order to disperse power

Giving up the control afforded by boundaries in order to allow fluidity across borders

Giving up the control of autonomy to find fluidity and freedom in collaboration

Giving up the focus on a single subject to allow multiplicity to reflect that subject in to infinity

Giving up the dominance of one modality to allow every discipline to provide metaphors for the others

Giving up the ability to understand images concretely in order to be immersed in paradox

Giving up the ability to reflect the subject in order to allow multiplicity to infuse
Intimate Immensity

Table of Contents

Opposites in Tension:  page 2
Fluidity Across Borders:  page 4
Motion and Multiplicity Rendered Transparently:  page 6
Transition and Transformation:  page 10
Unity and Multiplication:  page 13
Imperfection and Unity:  page 15

The Immensity of Irregular Variation
The Intimacy of Delicate Transparency:  page 19
Intimate Immensity

Opposites in Tension

A river can invert a mountain by flowing gently around rocks, gathering small amounts of sediment and dispersing them downstream. By omitting the decisiveness of impatient force, it manages incredible strength.

In 4’33” of Silence, John Cage echoed this beauty, giving up the need to pour his own sound into the space around him in order to highlight the dynamics of what was already there - the sounds of rustling papers, the humming of air vents, and the shifting of feet on the floor. The strength of this piece is in its weakness. The power of water is in its fluid malleability.

Tohaku Hasegawa created a delicate and monumentally scaled ink wash painting titled Pine Wood, much of which is left blank. By omitting detail, Hasegawa gives room for the imagination of the viewer to flow through the space between trees, projecting memory into the subtle variations of the paper’s fiber. The strength and expansive imagination of his image is in its lack of defined detail.

Hasegawa Tohaku, Pine Wood, ink on paper, 16th century
Current location: Tokyo National Museum, Japan
Source: Wikimedia Commons
God founded this truth, speaking into existence a universe whose beauty is manifested in its unfilled space, and whose wonder is embedded in the finite people who project their imaginations into the expanding space between planets. Its infinity is expanded by its lack of concrete definition.

Echoing the beauty of infinity in undefined space, Jesus demonstrates strength in weakness, subverting the forcefulness of religious and political power structures by turning them inside out. Adopting the title Lord (Caesar’s name for himself), he rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey rather than a big war horse. Inverting a familiar Hebrew image of God’s people as majestic cedars of Lebanon, He likened the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. (Mustard was seen as an annoying pest of a bush in 1st century Israel, and was even banned by Jewish law at the time) He modeled this kingdom by washing his disciple’s feet, sharing meals with the people that everyone else had abandoned, and willingly dying a criminal’s death to contour the oppressive force of the Roman empire and the rigidity of religious systems. His strength was embodied by His choosing weakness.

This paradoxical dynamic of losing to find, strength in weakness, and giving up control in order to allow ideas to unfold has inspired my thesis work and turned my life upside down in the most delightful ways imaginable. I hope that I have done it some justice in this creative process as I seek to craft fluid transitions between opposites pulled into tension with one another.

The painter Thomas Lyon Mills describes the tension between seeing and not seeing, hiding and revealing with visceral layers of metaphor.

The seen needs the unseen. Together they make a barely perceptible but unforgettable odor, the smell of time, of fermenting mud, meat, and roots pressed firmly together in decay. It is fossilized memory, buried. Miraculously, drawing reverses the process, strips layers away, and reveals what has been hidden. As layers are revealed, as the scent grows stronger, things go transparent, weightless, and make a disquieting kind of no sound.1

Mills’ words follow the alternating dynamic that animates natural cycles of water, Carbon, and Nitrogen through ecosystems. These cycles are echoed in the process of studying them, from a sense of wonder and lack of understanding to a perceived comprehension through simplified diagrams, then eventually back to a realization of how little one knows about such a complex thing as the movement of water through clouds, cells, rivers and oceans. This alternating movement between clarity and haziness or the seen and the unseen is a driving inspiration in my work. Its activity depends entirely on the potential of fluidity across borders constructed between defined and undefined, clarity and fogginess, new and old. In a related way, Richard Tuttle’s “Village III” series of drawings map the invisible space between things with an eloquent economy that continues through much of his work, weaving themes of strength in weakness through a multitude of forms.
Fluidity Across Borders

Water has an amazing ability to transpose itself with protean virtuosity across borders, from the atmosphere to the ground to the cells in your body. Its movement is defiant of divisions as it carries nutrients through layers of compost, from rotting biomass to new sprouts. Fluid movement has the potential to ransack rigid divisions and connect silos with an energy that is echoed in the work of thinkers as diverse as Charles Jencks, Andy Clark, and Friedrich Nietzsche. It multiplies possibilities, inverts assumptions, and unfolds connections shriveled up by dry, dead air.

A downpour does all of this expansive and poly-directional work with a unified current of raindrops whose singularity is unavoidable. Droplets are compressed into unanimous gravity. Singularity breathes out multiplicity - Rain is a stampede that does not sway because it sways in every direction at once. Framed transparently, this is not a contradiction but an active paradox. An object reflected in water allows both it and its inverse to exist simultaneously.

My process of absorbing and using reclaimed materials is inspired by this cycling and reflected inversion. I am interested in treating humble materials as if they are extravagant, rendering the border between fine and common transparently. Similarly, my work seeks to craft a fluid movement between the reverence of sacred spaces and the imperfection that presents itself in the everyday.
Glory is not too lofty a thing to be found in both, and inversions of power and control lay the groundwork for boundaries to be blurred with this kind of energy.

My hope is that walls will become transparent, borders will be softened by fog, and centrifugal motion will overpower rigid definitions of sacred and common, immense and intimate, complex and simple. Occupying opposites simultaneously and bridging across tension are catalysts for paradox. Paradox, in turn, is only active when borders have been softened by mist and rain water.

Andy Clark amplifies the dynamics of this sort of softening in his book Natural Born Cyborgs. In the act of dancing fluidly between descriptions of organic, mechanical, digital, and systematic bodies, he employs an almost recklessly holistic language that actively blurs the boundaries between these segregated realms, igniting the tension between them. For example, he frames a discussion of identity within a kinetic and transparent structure that sweeps up both technology and humans in broad linguistic gestures.

For our sense of self, of what we know and of who and what we are, is surprisingly plastic and reflects not some rigid preset biological boundary so much as our ongoing experience of thinking, reasoning, and acting within whatever potent web of technology and cognitive scaffolding we happen currently to inhabit.²

With a powerful and broad stroke, Clark’s language sweeps across both individual and collective identity, flinging both into a kinetic whole under mechanical words like “scaffolding” and digitally-loaded concepts like the web. For Clark, this dynamic structure catches both technology and cognition in its sprawling body. As if this movement weren’t enough, he tosses the whole web-scaffold-kinetic-complex in to a nebulously defined complex of other such structures.

Motion and Multiplicity Rendered Transparently

What animates these loosely described structures? As technology adapts to human use and humans adapt to their technology, a co-evolutionary process begins to emerge for Clark. As individuals in larger numbers change in response to sprawling objects like cell phones, larger frameworks can even begin to shift.

...the passage to transparency often involves a delicate and temporally extended process of co-evolution. Certainly, the technology must change in order to become increasingly easy to use, access, and purchase; but this is only half the story because at the same time, elements of culture, education, and society must change also.3

Perhaps these elements are Clark's web-scaffolds. However nebulous the shifting identity of individuals and their collective complexes, the overarching momentum is clear: There is a surprisingly organic whole-vision embedded in Clark's language that loops itself into the circular motion of things like food chains and water cycles. Clark is very intentional about weaving a continuous thread of animated adaptation through culture, technology, information, and people. As an animated thread, its linguistic action is somewhat amplified for narrative effect, but all of this is in service of a beautiful task: Tossing previously static and segregated systems into fluid motion.

As motion blurs the boundary between figure and ground in a photograph, mist blurs the distinction between a building and the space behind it. The mechanisms can be seen as allegories of one another. Water particles suspended in air multiply the light passing through them, while a long exposure photograph of a runner multiplies legs and arms in space. Multiplicity can be made fluid in a still image by the ephemeral layering of transparency. The mass of multitudes is carried by the wispy, transparent edges.

![Eadweard J. Muybridge](EadweardJ_Muybridge_Animal_locomotion.png)

Eadweard J. Muybridge
Location: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
1887
Permission: PD-old, PD-US: Public Domain

This paradox between delicate transparency and multiplicity has emerged as a recurring theme in my work. When I render an edge or plane on a flat surface, I paint echoes of it somewhere in the periphery. Second, third, and fourth versions of a form are often partially erased with white paint, wax, or water, which I liken physically to fog. In multiplying edges, I blur the clarity necessary to define rigid borders between objects or ideas. While Hasegawa’s Pine Wood accomplishes this by taking away information, I hope to simultaneously subtract and multiply information, which is an inherently paradoxical process. The fragility of subtraction and erasure is pulled into tension with the mass and force generated through multiplication. This tension is stabilized visually by transparency, which has the power to unify two objects by making them both visible at the same moment.

I have been dramatically influenced by the painter Elinore Hollinshead, who renders transparency with a virtuosity of rumbling textures that give space the feeling of perpetual movement. Working with wax and thick impasto bolstered with objects collaged into the surface, Hollinshead’s paintings lend physicality to delicate layers of wispy figure - ground relationships.
Elinore Hollinshead, Blur, 2003
egg tempera and mixed media over monoprint, 48 x 38 inches
Used by permission.

The artist Peter Milton, by contrast, uses layers of meticulously executed tone to gather up thin clouds of transparency that seem to meander through space. While I strive towards the physicality of Hollinshead’s work in my painted surfaces, my sculptural structures echo the airiness of Milton’s images. Sculpted forms tend to be factual and decisive almost by definition, and it has been important to me to pull this into tension, creating designs that spatially engage the cube in a fragile, gauzy, or tenuous way. Brutalist architecture and International Modernism, using the cube as their modular design element, uphold a certain strength in systematic regularity. My structures seek to pull this association into tension with its opposites, and so irregularity, precariousness, and imperfection have been my models for construction. Transparency is a stabilizer of these characteristics. It allows a form to be solid and planar while letting the eye pass like air through it, to reveal layers of tenuous detail.
Henrik Søderstrøm, Intimate Immensity
copper, wood, plaster, sinew, mirror, pastel, gouache, & acrylic 2011 (details)
Transition and Transformation

I am inspired by the fluidity with which Diana Al-Hadid uses formal qualities or transparency and unfolding space as an analogue for interactions of content across her work. Al-Hadid has said in interviews that her architecturally founded work, which weaves together influences from Christian Cathedrals and Muslim Mosques under the emotive umbrella of crumbing walls and spatial dislocation, is not conceived or constructed as a solid mass. Rather, she talks about the process of beginning with a centralized core and opening up planes from this point, often tracing spirals that in her imagination are associated with patterns as diverse as galaxies and the rotation of Muslim pilgrims around the Kaaba. She has used the word transparency4 to describe formal aspects of her structures and drawings, but there is a tremendous conceptual echo of this word in the way she mixes influences from East and West, bodily and planetary. Contrasting reference points become transparent to one another as she blends them together into cavernous structures, and multifarious realms of content are harmonized by the shifting of transparent borders. Not only is there visual transparency between planes in her work, but also a transparency across layers of content and between content and form. This models a type of fluidity and movement that I strive to carry into my own creative practice.

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Henrik Söderström, Intimate Immensity

copper, wood, ceramic, bronze, yarn, pastel, gouache, & acrylic 2011 (details)
Inspired by this multiplying of kinetic reference points, I plot a variety of moving or transition references in my work. Boats, bridges, shipping palettes, windows, doors, water in movement, and string reminiscent of mapping are all blended together into a structure that visually re-enforces open space, transparent walls, and permeable surfaces. All of this imagery is like a verb list in my studio practice, and echoes Andy Clark’s language about plasticity. In his work the language he selects becomes an agent of multiplication and transparency. This transitory tone flowing through Clark’s ideas finds an eloquent counterpart in ever-transforming, ever unfolding images of David Altmejd’s installations.

Altmejd displayed two bodies of work at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, Spring of 2011, that actively blur the lines between interior and exterior, static and moving. Using transparent Plexiglass as a lattice on which to grow webs of objects and line, the artist echoes modernist architecture while evoking a complexity reminiscent of the gothic. A press release for the show describes this fluctuating state.

As definitions between inside and outside become blurred, Altmejd shows them at once to be both malleable distinctions and part of a continuum. At stake in these works is the fantasy of unity and containment.\footnote{Press release produced on the occasion of a solo show by David Altmejd at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, March 18th-April 23rd 2011.}

\begin{center}
\textit{Henrik Søderstrøm, Intimate Immensity}
\par pastel, gouache, & acrylic
\par 2011 (detail)
\end{center}
Unity and Multiplication

Some sort of unity is often expected to follow from deconstructing the mechanisms of containment. Symbolic entities as diverse as Modernism and Facebook have been heralded as currents whose work is to tear down walls of segregation so that humanity can be united. This concept, which has in the past found a vehicle in the design of International Modernism and the language of Analytic Philosophy, can falsely simplify the often paradoxical relationship between unity and homogeneity.

Altmejd’s work actively blurs this assumption, avoiding unity and homogeneity alike in lieu of a multiplicity of parts speaking at once.

...Altmejd’s works suggest a kind of infinite lineage with each work both exploring a particular idea and contributing to the opening of another. Rather than creating terminal artworks, complete and ossified, Altmejd’s works are manifestations of objects that are always transforming and forever open.

A driving force in Altmejd’s art aesthetic is the continual transformation that thrives on irregularity. There is a similar irregularity potent at the heart of collaborative and multi-disciplinary work, which has found a fantastic support base in a Post-Modern paradigm. While simplified expert illustrations are finding a home next to microscopy photographs and charts in science textbooks and through medical illustration suppliers like the Netter Collection and Nucleus Medical Media, bioremediation science, art education, social activism, and performance art are finding a common home in the work of Mel Chin.7 Modernism would keep painting, sculpture, architecture, and certainly science in different silos, making for extraordinarily regular and homogenous categories, each made concrete by their own ideologies, but Post-Modernism allows these areas to coexist in relationships that challenge the objective stability of each. Irregularity is a potent fuel, not a blemish, in this paradigm. The often tense coexistence of diverse elements in a common solution is a paradox in practice. Its energy and usefulness is common to tension between two materials, two pieces of content, two forms, and two artists swept up in an art collaboration.

In a compilation of Thomas McEvilley's work titled The Tomb of the Zombie, the critic is credited with strong words on the subject of silos. Specifically, he accuses his preceding art critics of segregating their discourse from other intellectual discourses.

(Our forerunners) have ghettoized themselves and us by specializing in detail and nuance to the point of saying to the rest of the world of discourse "Keep out! Onlywe are the priests of the image. Away ye profane." And it worked, they left it to us and they left us by ourselves.8

In the same compilation, McEvilley celebrates the fact that, at a 1994 conference on art criticism, many of the speakers had focused their words on culture at large, almost neglecting to mention Art. This is positive, he holds, because through Modernism and Formalism, the visual arts have relegated themselves to a tomb of elitist dialogue. He identifies the source of the segregation as Clement

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6 Press release produced on the occasion of a solo show by David Altmejd at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, March 18th-April 23rd 2011.
7 See “Operation Paydirt” by Mel Chin.
Greenberg’s regurgitation of Kant, who outlined a method for properly apprehending an artwork and facilitating an aesthetic experience. Kant’s viewpoint opens the doors wide for the argument that only specialists can fully appreciate Art. McEvilley raises the battle cry that art is not a mystery that is beyond the grasp of ordinary human beings and available only to a priestly caste.⁹ To overcome the impression that it is, he submits the idea that art aught to put itself on par with Coca-Cola labels and engage with broader cultural dialogues. He praises artworks that function as unofficial diplomatic channels and icons of communication between different communities.¹⁰

Henrik Søderstrøm, Intimate Immensity
palette wood, pastel, acrylic
2011 (detail)

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Imperfection and Unity

Mel Chin’s work, which brings together communities of scientists, artists, and politicians around humble things like block parties in New Orleans, funnels the force of McEvilley’s sarcasm into decidedly optimistic and playful orchestrations of people and ideas.

By adopting unpretentious materials to echo the forms of imperfect docks, porches, and homes, I hope to add a visual voice to a growing chorus of web-weavers as diverse as Mel Chin, Andy Clark, and Mark Zuckerberg. I frame my work within shifting squares and transparent cubes as an imperfect altar on which traditionally sacred imagery, old bug-infested apple trees, warped palette wood, polished floors, sacred rivers and water drills are mixed together in an open-walled space.

I create cast iron anchors, but their form is swept up into the kinetic shapes of seeds sprouting and buds twisting as they grow. They are not fixed to any boat, but their chains, forged with writhing lines and falling apart at the seams, run off into a loose river of driftwood underneath a warped bridge. The boat that is their mate, made from irregular, cracked planks, is suspended on the rafters of a house built with transparent walls. I see a formal resemblance between its arched hull and the arched ceilings of cathedrals. Fluidity across divided words (boat and roof, sea-level and heaven-bound cathedral peak) is crafted by threads of formal connection.

The cube is not cemented in its role as a grid of cubicle walls, but becomes a shifting image of fluidity and responsiveness in my work. I employ it reverently, echoing the 90-degree angles of the reclaimed wood that I collect. I make this choice instead of forcing organic shapes out of a square-sawn board, and rendering square walls with shifting lines and multiple edges. Wood reclaimed from the trash I treat reverently because I find in its imperfection an embedded sacredness more profound than that of grand architectural statements meant to overshadow the homes around them. I make art to worship an immense God who chooses to be seen on His earth in the form of a baby born in a barn under culturally questionable parenthood, sharing his first bed with donkeys and mice.

For this reason, I render holiness with imperfect gestures, using humble materials to blur the line between religious and common. I mean no irreverence to the traditionally sacred, but I intend to call attention to the elements of sacredness coursing through the imperfect, throwing the border between the two into kinetic instability.

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11 Zuckerberg worked with Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes to create Facebook, which has been credited with playing a significant role in the collapse of totalitarian regimes by connecting people across borders and facilitating idea-sharing.

12 He [David, earthly “father” of Jesus] traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. – The Bible: New Living Translation, Luke chapter 2, verses 5-7.
Henrik Søderstrøm, Boat Cathedral studies 3 & 4
pastel, gel transfer, colored pencil, gesso
2010
The same playful web-weaving that animates Clark’s descriptions of human-to-technology connections also brings to life the fluidity of blurring boundaries and borders. Both can be folded into a celebration of potential connecting threads between silos. As in Clark’s descriptions, there is tremendous energy embedded in the fact that these threads shift as the collection of participants changes and multiplies. Again, transparency and openness are harmonizing elements in this multi-layered complexity, but they are very different from a simple idea of unity, which does away with the character of individual parts. If two boards from shipping palettes are to work together, they cannot be sanded to the point of homogeneity, because they will lose their tension and life. If drawn lines in perspective and physical lines in space are to harmonize, they have to remain separate. Union and multiplicity have to exist in tension with one another in order for either to function at all. This is echoed formally in Josef Albers’ principle of simultaneous color contrast, where complementary (opposite) colors strengthen and intensify one another when they are placed side by side in a unified composition. Mixed together as one, they create a mute gray with no life or leaning.
In a paradox-infused celebration of union and multiplicity, Friedrich Nietzsche praises the momentary merging of one human with another and of mankind with nature as an annihilation of the principle of individuation, the illusory stability of isolation. In sprinting words evoking Dionysian fervor, Nietzsche describes the connection between multiplicity, movement, and unity.

Transform Beethoven’s “Hymn to Joy” into a painting; let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck- then you will approach the Dionysian. Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or “impudent convention” have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn aside and were not fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity.

The annihilation of the principium individuationis, the principle of individuation, is both a vital prerequisite to and a result of immersion in the world. Nietzsche calls this annihilation an artistic phenomenon and an artistic jubilee for nature itself. The dynamic he describes is one of fluidity between individual and surroundings. Like Mel Chin’s sprawling projects, it deconstructs divisions and dances on strings pulled tense between silos.

This is very near to the sense of merging that inspires my work. Images of rain, boats, bridges, windows, and transparent planes merge across a field of sculptural and painted objects. Visually, I am seeking a translation between drawn lines and physical lines in space that echoes Nietzsche’s transformation of music into described image. Rendering architectural divides as transparent and building framed walls that have no solid substance, I generate a space that leads a person’s eyes and body through a fluid web of lines and images. I am seeking a unified outline of space that simultaneously describes small cavities of intimacy and projects itself into expansive fields of immensity. The effort to find a unity between these two is a paradox that I find visually challenging and conceptually enlivening.

Henrik Søderström
Intimate Immensity
pastel, gouache, & acrylic, 2011
(detail)


The Immensity of Irregular Variation
The Intimacy of Delicate Transparency
A weakness that becomes a strength

Meghan Delehanty notes that, in the realm of neural imaging, some familiar landmarks are missing in the brains of normal individuals, “making their use as reference points on which to base a standard map impossible.” In functional images, this irregular disorientation cuts through usability. However, the loss of standard reference points is a generative source of energy and possibilities in collaborative artistry. If a choreographer, speaking to a visual artist about a set design, uses the word rhythm to describe an aspect of his vision, he is likely talking about some movement of limbs that is extended and built over time. The set designer, as a visual artist, may hear the word rhythm and, in reflecting it back at the choreographer is in her stage designs, will not have the same reference point. Her definition of the word may be analogous, but it is probably located in a different region of expression, linked to the repetition of similar forms, the cascading of related colors across a surface, and the echoing of angles through space. The context for these types of rhythm is not temporally extended like body movement. This could be framed as a misunderstanding or a translational gap in the world of science, but it is a source of productive tension in the artistic process. It is an imperfection, or a weakness, turned on its head to become a strength.

The reason that this type of tension, which stands as a hurdle to be crossed in science, becomes such an asset in the arts is rooted in a general potential of fuzziness, fogginess, and lack of concrete definition. In these fields, it is possible to find a multitude of creative potential. Patrick Grim happens to call attention to this energy in his article Concrete Images for Abstract Questions as he pulls a section from Da Vinci’s Treatise on Painting:

(L)ook at walls splashed with a number of stains or stones of various mixed colors. If you have to invent some scene, you can see there resemblances to a number of landscapes, adorned in various ways with mountains, rivers, and rocks, trees, great plains, valleys, and hills. Moreover, you can see various battles, and rapid actions of figures, strange expressions on faces, costumes, and an infinite number of things...

The beauty in this is the infinite possibility that can unfold out of an image that is partially or imperfectly defined. When an image is perceived as concrete or definite, this unfolding, reflective potential is shut down. Both partial clarity and imperfection can be catalysts for a collaborative relationship between a work of art and a viewer. The weakness of imperfection becomes a strength with the potential to reveal multiple and diverse meanings.

This notion is reflected in an analysis of hyper-real animation by Vivian Sobchack, which upholds the opacity of early animation as a pillar of the imagination. The imperfection of early animation,

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which separated it so clearly from the *perfect-integral realism* of photographic film, is in fact the very attribute which allowed it to take such a powerful hold over the imagination.

...perhaps insistent on its own discrete metaphysics, animation might desire not "integral realism," but "integral irrealism"—and thus be guided by an alternative ideal founded on the "total" creation (not re-creation) of the world in its own image (the referent of "its" here *not* the "outside world" but, rather, "animation" itself).17

An image that gives up the goal of perfectly representing the “real” is free to reflect versions of itself infinitely into the imagination. This imperfection is the abandonment of concrete, defined truth.

Defiantly countering Delehanty’s assumptions about simplicity in imaging, the multiplication of reference points, which expands singular clarity, even increases empirical value in some cases. Imagine a political analyst whose job is to report for the BBC on the unfolding of governmental conflict in Egypt. Reliance on a single image or source would be a cause of concern. The reporter might lose her job. A journalistic praxis, though, that involved information gathered from twenty blogs and Facebook posts fueled by opposing perspectives, local news sources catering to both pro and anti-Mubarak groups, and propaganda pamphlets produced by different protest groups, would be more respectable. Not only would it involve more rigor (something that westerners tend to equate with good work), but it would be commonplace to assume that a synthesis of conflicting perspectives might be the best method of rendering opaque the problem of bias. This is generally associated with a step towards empirical reliability.

The same multiplication of reference points that inflates and strengthens analysis of conflicts written from an outside perspective animates the potential for different senses, housed within a single body, to change sources and move the locations of perception and sensory analysis. Lisa Cartwright and Brian Goldfarb call this intrasensory plasticity. They begin their discussion with a somewhat flippant rhythm of questions from Deleuze and Guattari.

Is it really so sad and dangerous to be fed up with seeing with your eyes, breathing with your lungs, swallowing with your mouth, talking with your tongue, thinking with your brain...? Why not walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin.... Where psychoanalysis says, stop, find your self again, we should say instead, “Let’s go further still.... Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It’s a question of life and death....” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 151)

Cartwright and Goldfarb punctuate this forceful thread of hypotheticals with the concrete example of research done at the University of Wisconsin at Madison by Paul Bach-y-Rita. Rita’s research “provides a concrete realization of the idea of intersubjectively rerouting the senses by introducing an electrical sensor that interfaces with the tongue and can be used to transmit visual information.”18 This research is primarily geared towards the *replacement* of sight lost (in blind patients or in firefighters moving through areas of low visibility, but what if it was applied to the task of **diversifying**

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the mechanisms of sight, as a journalist diversifies sources? What if a subject could “see” the same visual phenomena with both their eyes and their tongue? What if the images transmitted through both of these senses were in tension with one another? Would this provide a fluidity in the perceptual field akin to what Deleuze and Guattari describe? Would it necessitate an acceptance of paradox; that two different things can be true at the same time?

My work, which often delights in contradictory tension between opposites, celebrates questions like these. By framing my architecture transparently, I make it possible to experience the same space from both inside and outside. This blurring of boundaries is formally inspired by some of Robert Venturi’s memorial work,¹⁹ which addresses the simultaneous presence and non-presence of memory and history. I hope to orchestrate a collision between inside and outside, using a framed wall not to separate the two but to pick away at the assumed division between them. In the same way, I base much of my work around the cube, which sets up expectations of perfection and regularity, while at the same moment blurs the stability of edges by multiplying the lines that describe them. Employing many of the vernaculars associated with architectural diagraming allows me to contradict my own imagery by erasing entire sections with fog and watermarks. My hope is that the walls between clarity and haziness, apprehension and emotive experience, stability and precariousness, will be softened by mist, and that transparency will allow opposites to exist in dynamic tension.

A journalist has little trouble dealing with the tension between two opinionated and opposing sources. (even when they are so polarized as to be mirror-opposites of one another) The task in her case would be to present both sides on equal footing, allowing any contradictions to appear as opaque.

The perpetual tension of paradox sparks movement and launches reflected images away from monotony. Where two opposites coexist the stagnation of defining things concretely is beautifully upset. In the midst of this instability, the decision to give up the need for taxonomy is the groundwork for any sort of understanding. The strength of paradox is defined by the weakness of efforts to classify, understand, or define a homogenous whole. Contradiction here is not a flaw but a source of multifaceted beauty. Mixing, bridging, and dissolving elements in solution does not weaken the elements involved. It amplifies the individual character of each by allowing the tensions between them to activate the whole body. Multiple trajectories, perspectives, and temperaments can be folded into the same kinetic whole, moving as energetically as an Andy Clark cyborg.

Here is why transparency is a stabilizing element for this type of multiplicity, and why it is an anchor in both my two and three-dimensional artwork: Water is transparent. It does not block or overshadow what is below it. Rather, it shifts light to alter form. What emerges as visible is the product of a beautiful tension between mass, light, and water particles in movement. Delicate as it is dynamic, this tension requires the balance of its participants and fluidity of movement between them.

Mark Bradford and Steven Siegel have had a tremendous influence on this facet of my process. Both absorb and use materials in a way that is natural and fluid. Bradford’s practice of picking up pieces of signage, trash, and printed material from the cityscape around him and depositing them in his paintings is reminiscent of geological compacting. He builds up layers, sands away, and adds

¹⁹ Specifically Venturi & Rauch’s Ghost Structure, built in Franklin Court, Philadelphia in 1976
more, allowing the content of the materials to speak through webs of complexity. Siegel, whose current project is a massive collection of trash woven together into a 75 foot long (and growing) linear tapestry, uses a similarly transparent and fluid method of collecting and integrating objects. His work often directly mimics natural forms and geological build up, but his process is also very responsive, echoing the movement of water and sediment more subtly. Installing a site specific work for Siegel involves locating materials or objects that have been produced and discarded locally, and his project will often change dramatically to fit what he collects. The attitude behind this work reflects a type of abandonment that is open to shifting artistic vision in response to the character of materials.

My process, from ideation to making, seeks to echo this tension. I treat reclaimed palette wood with enough reverence to let it speak. This alteration is achieved by shifting the edge quality, texture, or placement of the wood so as to not overshadow or force the board into location. I do not use copper leaf to make something look like it is made of copper, but to speckle a surface with the trembling variation of a delicate metal that would blow away if the window was open. I try to craft a process of working that is itself transparent to the character of my materials, allowing variation to speak and multiple lines to echo one another in spatial movement. Transparency makes paradox possible in materials, process, and content as it makes fluid the coexistence of opposites.