

Chapter II.

Immersive Environments

Perhaps, like a piece of rock that falls in space horizontally and breaks through layers of a night sky reflected on the water surface, turning into multiple repetitions of a pulsing ripple – to my right and to my left. I'm the ripple and the rock falls through me into the darkness.⁸

2.1. Introduction

In *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (2014), Giuliana Bruno argues that the essence of materials is not in materials themselves but rather in the activation of material relations. She understands projection in the works of James Turrell or Anthony McCall as landscapes where the “flow of time and the experience of duration” is essentially the passage of light, developed not only as an “external but also internal phenomenon”, where light essentially becomes “permeable architecture” (Bruno 2014, 8). Her views underscore my thinking about the role of materials, light and structures in spatial performance (in an exhibition space). However, I go further and explore material relations and their role not only in the space of the exhibition, but also in their unfolding prior to entering the public space – that is, investigating how such material relations come to be structured, arranged and imagined, from inception to prototyping / testing in the studio. Based on this exploration, I will argue that the performance of space in immersive environments is not structured solely through relations between materials alone but also through scenographic unfolding – as material and technological mediation and transformation of body space relations. By this statement I suggest that the manner in which media, space and materials

⁸ *Deep Waters*

are combined, both inside the studio in the development of such performative spaces and then within the exhibition space, leads to a particular blurring of the relationship between the body of spectators and the mediated space itself – a blurring that will shift in intensities and qualities depending on the different way materials are organized in the space. This argument should be also viewed as a first step in the evolving definition of scenographic unfolding as a lens through which to understand the performance of immersive space, how it arises through practice and how existing definitions of immersion may be reconfigured through this practice.

Discussing the performance of immersive environments that employ materials, architectural structures and recorded audio-visual media, I follow a key understanding of immersion in visual arts that considers the bodies and the imaginative minds of the audience as fusing with the performing screen (Bruno 2014, Iles 2016), and define immersion as the blurring of media, bodies and space. I observe this from two perspectives: (1) Iles’ interpretation of the viewer who, within the given space, becomes “yet another screen” by being transformed into a “hybrid cinematic body for the duration of her merging with the technology within the given *environment*” (Iles 2016, 124, my emphasis); and (2) Bruno’s understanding of the screen projection as “relational psychic architecture [...] a screen-brain that leads to matters of imaginary space – that is, to engaging the kind of projections that are forms of the imagination” (Bruno 2014, 123, 165).

Being the audience as well as the author and the maker of these environments, I am immersed not only in the performance of the immersive environment but also in all the steps of its production as well as dissemination, composed of: (1) the experience of the environment and

⁹ Iles draws a connection to the Dimensionist Manifesto here. In 1936 in Paris, Kandinsky, Duchamp, Picabia, Arp, Sirato and others had signed the Dimensionist Manifesto, declaring that “a completely new art form will develop...The human being, rather than regarding the art object from the exterior, becomes the center and five-sensed subject of the artwork” (Iles 2016, 124).

its natural phenomenon; (2) the creative processes of working with materials and technologies; and (3) the transformation of space / audience relationship into the performance of the immersive environment. Here, then, I will describe how exactly, from the point of working with materials, such immersion – the blurring of bodies, minds, screen and space – is actually conceived, experimented with and implemented – thus making possible a new kind of scenographic experience where the separation between audience, stage, media and material breaks down.

In order to do so, it is first and foremost important to clarify that immersion did not originate in spaces altered by digital media and technologies (as it may appear from the wealth of media-related literature), but in fact derives from the “Latin *immersio* and may refer to any act of experience of plunging into something, without necessarily applying to computer-generated virtual environments” (Dogramaci and Liptay 2015).

In this chapter, I define scenographic unfolding as a key term through which to view the performance of immersive environment through an early series of installations called *Deep Waters I, II* and *River*, produced and exhibited between 2008 and 2014. Departing from memories and experiences of natural phenomenon as the inception of these immersive environments and their performances, I insert my own body interchangeably as the author and as the audience to explore the blurring process of media, bodies and screens that I discuss above. From these perspectives, I engage in, observe and evaluate the processes of the scenographic unfolding in action, as well as the type of performance and immersion it affords within the space of the studio and the exhibition.

2.2. The Scenographic Unfolding

The summer rains of East Bohemia coloured many moments of my childhood memories; I sit on a bench in front of the local store, tucked under the roof away from the rain. The bench I sit on is too high for my feet to touch the ground. I rock my legs back and forth and watch large

raindrops falling down, bouncing up and down, breaking the surface of large puddles into hundreds of tiny ripples. Here, there, and over there! It is like a grand ballet of dancing raindrops and pulsing water patterns. The rhythm is nearly hypnotic and the repetition pulls me in.

In *Matter and Memory*, the French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson reminds us that the most precious memories are those of childhood. They are not only beautiful, he writes, they are “coloured by poetry”. He explains that to become a base of artistic creation, memory needs to be worked upon. However, the most important thing is not the reconstruction of the actual memory, it’s the reconstruction of the “particular emotional atmosphere”, without which the evoking of the memory runs a risk of merely giving a “rise to a bitter feeling of disappointment” (Bergson 1965, 28).

But how does this “reconstruction of the emotional atmosphere” take place, first through the material and technological mediation in the studio and second through the transformation of the exhibition space and the bodies of the audience? In other words, how does the process of the transformation of space / body relationships and material and technological mediation unfold from its inception to its dissemination, and how can our understanding of immersion be reconfigured by this unfolding of performance in action?

The first thing to consider in exploring this mediation and transformation is the nature of materials that enable this reconstruction of the emotional atmosphere to take place. The Austrian-American architect Frederick Kiesler, for instance, observes that no object “of nature or of art exists without environment”. In this sense, he believes that an object can become an environment by its own expansion through light (Kiesler 1965, 18); light can also create presence (Kahn 2013, 26). Similarly, the Bauhaus artist Moholy-Nagy claims that light can be perceived as architecture and experimented with as a connective tissue between media (Bruno 2014, 110). Both the expansion and transformation of an object into an environment through light may be compared to

what Bruno termed *technological alchemy*, as a way to describe processes engaged in the activation of material relations. As an example, she uses the phrase “passing the celluloid” to describe where the film arrives at the screen on the surface of other media (Bruno 2014, 8). I employ this notion of transformation as an entry point to understanding the invisible processes engaged in the unfolding of objects into an environment where light not only becomes the connective tissue between media, but also plays a key role in the transformation of space / body relations.

2.2.1. *Deep Waters I.*

My curiosity about creating spaces that would allow the audience to enter the imaginative dimension of depth and the hypnotic performance of water ripples through the use of screens as affective membranes is what led me initially to material experimentation. At the same time, as the memory that opens this section makes clear, I was long fascinated by the immaterial nature of things: water, ripples, reflection and how one could combine these things. These optical qualities could be combined with light in such a way as to allow me to create physical spaces where depth became both the subject of the imagination as well as the actual dimension. These materials had to be firm and sturdy and at the same time, their structures had to appear as floating in the air, like rain or mist.

The first environment in which I attempted to convey my memory of the summer rain began with a series of projects titled *Deep Waters*. The first installation was composed of a number of large steel pools set on the floor, filled with water, with simple plumbing systems installed in the ceiling and vellum screens surrounding the pools. The plumbing distributed drops of water above each pool; each time a drop fell it was followed by a ripple, forming a symphony of pulsing lines on the water surface horizontally and making a corresponding pattern of pulsing

light on the screens vertically. Once the work was on display in an exhibition context, the pulsing of the ripples drew my audience in. Once they arrived, they would stand quietly around or sit down on nearby benches without speaking a word. Then they remained seated in complete silence, for a very long time, becoming in their own way the child that sits on a bench of their summer rain – just like I once did.

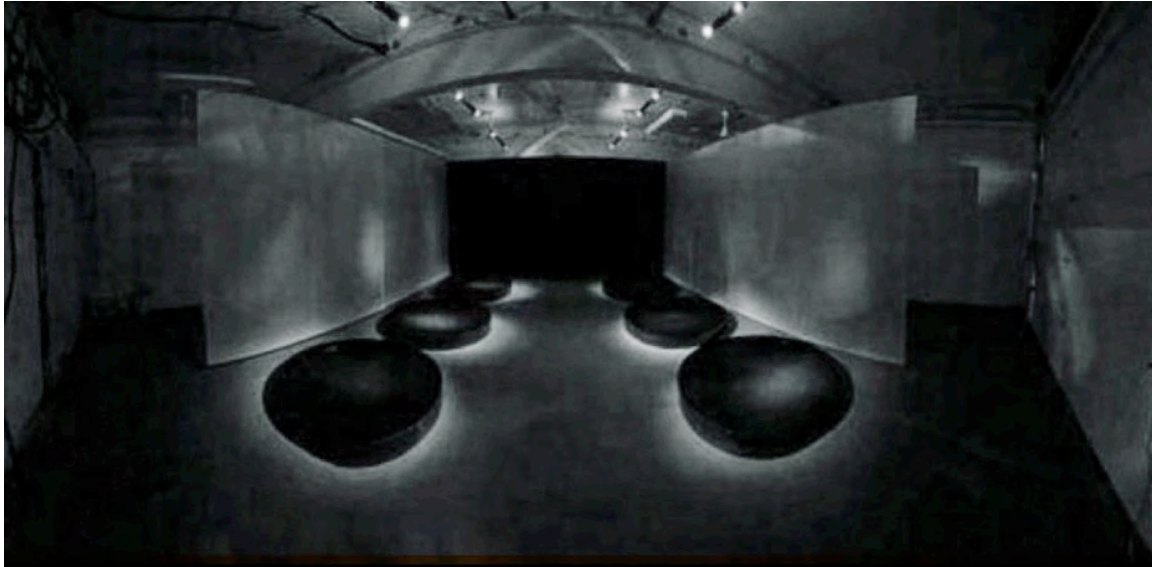


Figure 11. *Deep Waters I*. Installation view, NAC, St. Catharine's, ON (2008).

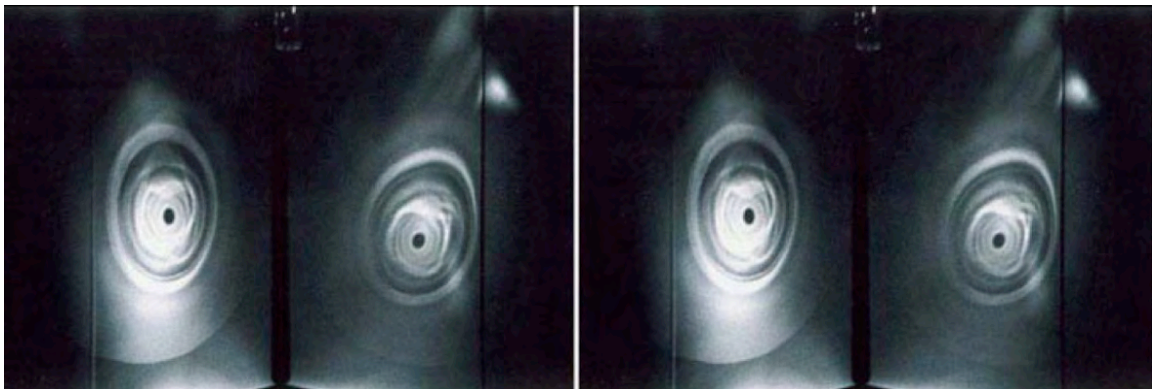


Figure 12. *Deep Waters I*. Installation view. Reflections on the vellum screens (2008).

Bruno's idea about materiality of screens and her argument that the depth may be found on the surface of the "cloth" and envelop the audience in "imaginary architectural formation in which projections, literally and metaphorically, can occur" (Bruno 2014, 78), clearly embody the

manner in which audiences encountered *Deep Waters*. One had the impression that the audience wanted to let the screens dissolve, using their bodies as the surface of the play of reflections. In nature, not unlike in an exhibition context, we become pulled into the phenomenon, such as a pulsing pattern of light reflected off the water surface, by their sheer capacity to overwhelm our “perceptual apparatus” (Murray 1997, 98). The distance of the screen as part of this perceptual apparatus acted as a barrier. But could the experimentation with materials, light and structures go further and construct a type of immersive environment where depth may be experienced both imaginatively and physically? In other words, could we design a space where the audience can physically enter the subject of the depth of waters and blend with the performance of a pulsing water ripple?

2.2.2. *Deep Waters II*

In searching for the answers to these questions, I began experimenting with several different materials and gradually became less interested in existing materials and more so in creating new ones. From there, I moved to using thread as a building block for my installations and engaged in constructions of weaving frames. After several test sessions with different threads, I settled on using monofilament for its optical qualities and designed a large frame. From this point, my determination turned my days into endless hours of labour in my pursuit of weaving the fabric of depth. Thread by thread, the subject of depth, as well as its material fabric, began to clothe my body and mind as it eventually would “clothe” the bodies (and minds) of an audience (Bruno 2014, 5).

This is best expressed by the architect Louis Kahn, who describes materials and light as a language by which poems were written even before we had languages. The “material making of light” by itself already is “an inspiration – besides the inspiration,” he says. Thus, materials hold

a strong promise to fulfill the growing need and the desire of the soul and the mind for expression (Kahn 2013, 26). Kahn addresses materials as an outlet for this expression further: “what nature gives us is the instrument of expression, which we all know as ourselves, which is like giving the instrument upon which the song of the soul can be played” (Kahn 2013, 26).

Thus far I had employed low-tech theatre lights, pools and dripping faucets to reflect the pulsing ripples of the water surface onto vellum screens. But what if I were to go a step further towards shifting the screen onto the bodies of the spectators? Instead of using light and water to create the effect, what if I were to employ video recording technology, not as a way to capture a narrative or a story (as might often be the case), but rather as the subject of the performance, in this case, the water ripple as moving light, activating the optical qualities of the materials and transforming the space and the audience? How will the scenographic unfolding take place between three different modalities of space: the nature (the phenomenon), the studio (the action of making) and the exhibition? In other words, how would the space be activated and include the bodies of the audience as integral to that activation and not separated from it?

Just like the first time we came here, it is quiet and dark. The streetlight on the bridge shines onto the river and reflects off the water's surface. As the river moves, the reflection makes a little bow of dancing light. I throw a rock in, just to see. It works beautifully, just like the first time: the light breaks into a pulsing ripple. We set the bag down, heavy with rocks from under the bridge. I mount a camcorder on the railing and centre the viewfinder on the river light. There, perfect. We start throwing rocks. At first we throw them too quickly and the image is chaotic, without enough time for one ripple to finish before the next one begins. Finally, we get an ideal rhythm and I record a good ten minutes of nice steady video.

The materials I worked with relied on light for their activation and required darkness and unreflective walls for the optical effects to take place. My studio had two white walls and two black walls: this allowed for a realistic testing of the work, which combined transparent and reflective materials as well as light projections. At this point, the space of the studio resembled a laboratory where viewing, experiencing, reflecting on and making the work became one

continuous process. In this respect, the idea of studio space begins to overlap with that of an exhibition. In *Between the Black Box and The White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (2014), Andrew V. Uroskie talks about the folding of the white cube into the black box space of the cinema which “transports the viewer away from her present time and local space, into the [...] cinematic world of the screen” (Uroskie 2014, 5). Uroskie’s argument, however, is not exclusive to the space of the exhibition and in relation to the viewer. As I learned, it begins in the studio, in relation to the material processes and the author who makes the work.

The next day, I get to my studio early. I load the projector with the video, aim it towards the screen and I turn off the lights. Finally, I see the ripples that we recorded last night in action. Formed entirely by captured movement of throbbing light on the pitch dark water surface, the projected light strums the strings of the screen as if it were a large harp. The optical quality of the fishing line, woven vertically with about one millimetre of space in between each line, absorbs the projected light and reflects it. This creates tiny shimmering reflections along the walls in my studio. The impact of the effect is not only visual, but also physical. Seduced by the performance of the screen, I sit in the darkness of my studio, and watch the endless fall of the rock and the repetition of water patterns.

Importantly, the transparent nature of my screens, in which the border between the image and the space began to dissolve, complements the theories of the American poet Vachel Lindsay, who described screens as a hybrid medium capable of crossing between interior and exterior worlds (Bruno 2014, 115), in a sense transforming separation into immersion due to the blurring of demarcations between body, screen and space. Lindsay’s idea of “sculpture-in-motion”, “painting-in-motion”, and “architecture-in-motion” is readily applicable to my screens, which became transparent objects capturing the performance of a pulsing ripple, and at the same time, formed the architectural environment of the performance.

After a while, I got up, walked towards the screen that leaned on an angle against my studio wall and squeezed my body behind it. Sandwiched between the wall and the screen, I viewed the ripples from there. A bit like standing behind a waterfall. Indeed, there was that feeling of being behind. Of being absorbed somehow. Eventually, the audience will replace my body. They will stand where I stand watching the performance of shimmering light on the strings. In fact, was I not the audience now?

The scale of the screens I fabricated was larger than myself and their architectural compositions forming the environment designed for gallery spaces were also larger than my studio. Thus, I could never see an entire work in my studio setting. There were moments in the studio, though, with materials, structures and light, which already by themselves became a performance, where the optical nature of my screens allowed me to layer the projected image and insert my body, and thereafter the body of the audience, into the work.

Previously, I established a definition of immersion as the transformation of bodies (of the audience) into 'screens' via blurring with projections (Iles 2016, 124), and as transformation of mind via projections that are forms of imagination (Bruno 2014, 8-9). I have observed, however, in my own processes of working with materials and technologies, designing and creating the type of immersive environments that Bruno and Iles describe, that my own body and mind were, in fact, inspired and affected by the processes in making *prior to* granting access to my audiences.

Here, immersion operates in two ways: (1) it inspires, imagines, plans and conceptualizes, or even dreams, about the forms of transformation of space / body relations within a performance of an immersive environment which does not yet exist; and (2) immersion as a reflection of the natural phenomenon and as an experience, memory or even a dream of space that has transformed us and served as an inspiration for the creative process in the first place. In either case, we can establish that the immersion arises from a type of situation or surrounding that "take over-all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus", and is driven by our desire to be surrounded by a "completely other reality, as different as water is from air" even if this reality arises as a result of optical illusion formed by material and technological mediation (Murray 1997, 98).

As we can see from the processes that I have just described, the scenographic unfolding is not limited to the material relations (Bruno 2014) or the experiences of the audiences (McKinney

2014, Bishop 2005) alone; instead, this unfolding is made possible by both the matter itself (the materials used including the body) and the structuring of these materials so that a specific transformation can take place where body, mind, space and screen lose their individual identities and engage in a kind of spontaneous interplay with and among each other.

I finished my designs, set them on the table and was ready to leave. Just as I was closing the door of my studio, I came to a key realization: I am not a designer of work, painting, or sculpture, or even installation, but rather a designer of space, spatio-material and temporal relations, and potentialities. The designs of my objects first became screens and those through the use of moving light and projections became environments. These made my audiences feel, imagine and perhaps even act – communicating not the memory but first and foremost its “emotional atmosphere” (Bergson 1965, 28).

2.2.3. River

The experimentation that formed the *Deep Water* series led to the next generation of works titled *River*. In the *River* series, the screens were made by engineering a different type of frame to produce ten-foot-tall conical structures, formed into screens with cast-glass bases. Once the structures were finished and suspended from the ceiling, I projected video images of white water rapids through them. I soon learned through my studio experiments with materials, structures and light, and by inserting my own body into the work during the test sessions, that any object, or any shape, cube, column, cone or even a person could become a screen (Mondloch 2010, 2). These designs became “landscapes in motion” (Bruno 2014, 112), as images projected through conical screens became material by means of molding three-dimensional space (Kiesler 2001, 75) and where human bodies, moving and experiencing, were included already in the design of the work.

Once the work was on display in an exhibition context, each cone transformed into a harmonious circular moving pattern of coiling water rapids and became an open invitation to walk right in and through the silent landscape of a *River* where the “passage of light became the passage of time” (Bruno 2014, 8). The movement of light through the landscape and its rhythm

also affected the movements of the audiences, fluctuating between walking, stopping and standing still. When they stopped they remained motionless, silently blurring with the coiling cones all around them. The audience became part of this landscape both physically and imaginatively. Their bodies absorbed the projected light, and at the same time cast shadows throughout the landscape. Their mind was pulled into the space and time – through immersion in a river that was their own.

This motion of emotion, combined with that of a body and the coiling landscape of water patterns trapped in the cones, and the way one became immersed in the environment, was not unlike the way one becomes immersed in observing the motion of the river from a bridge. In either case, movement in some way represents stillness. In other words, the performance was not about the river alone but also about the blurring of one's mind within the phenomenon of the movement of the river, where the mind appears to stand still while the river runs. The two different temporalities of the mind and the river became not only the subject of the performance but also a means of forming a key aspect of the installation.

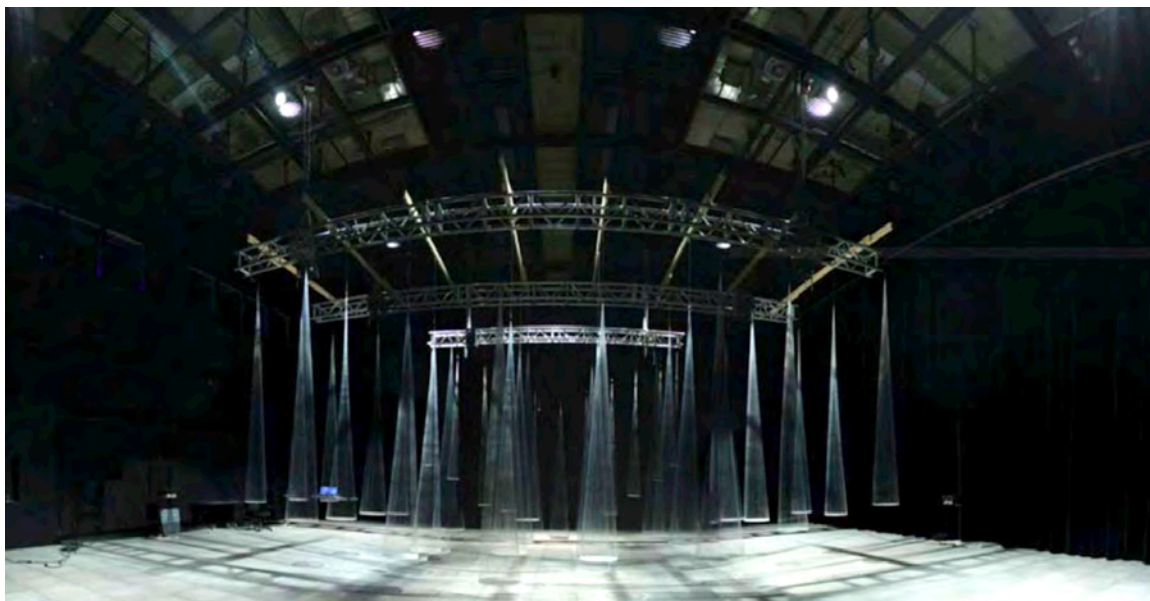


Figure 13. *River* Installation View, Hexagram Black Box, Concordia University, Montreal (2009).



Figure 14. *River* Installation View, Hexagram Black Box, Concordia University, Montreal (2009).

2.3. The Performance of Immersive Environment

My eyes take a few moments to adjust to the darkness in the room. Soon a number of pulsing ripples begin to appear. One – two – three – four – five. The sound follows. Clack – clack – clack – clack – clack. The eye catches what appears to be a rock flying through the space, breaking each screen into a ripple. After a while the ripples and the sound come to a stop, but the space does not become completely dark; there is a small wave of light sitting on every screen, swaying ever so gently. I now recognize each screen and see spaces between them, as well as other people around the perimeter of the gallery. I watch the swaying wave on each screen, and then decide to walk right into the screens. The ripples started coming again. I notice shimmering reflections of the projected light on other people, also on hands, my entire body. We are all living participants in the projection.



Figure 15. *Deep Waters II*. Installation View at NAC, Saint Catherine's, ON (2008).

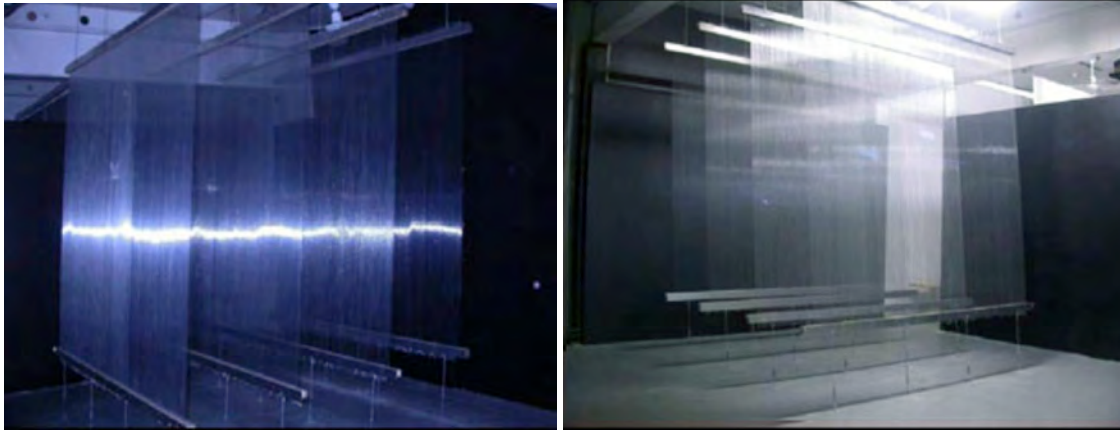


Figure 16. *Deep Waters II*. Installation View - screen detail (Screens fabricated in monofilament).

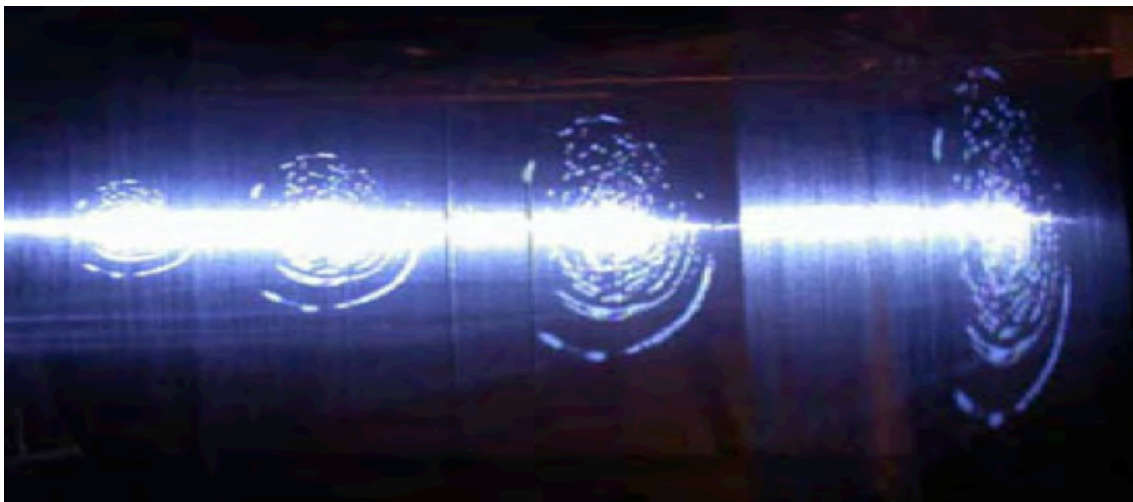


Figure 17. *Deep Waters II*. Installation View – screen detail (Screens fabricated in monofilament).

Enjoying what Barthes described as the “bliss of discretion”, the darkness of these exhibitions provide me with the benefit of invisibility and a certain degree of voyeurism towards the work and the audience (Barthes 1989, 348). This allows a kind of fluctuation between visibly sharing the space with the audiences or withdrawing myself from the scene of the action to evaluate on three levels: (1) to assess the work based on sharing the space and actions of these audiences and blurring with the work as well as them; (2) to listen and watch the response the audiences from a certain distance; and / or (3) to engage in a conversation with the audience and reflect on the experiences and ideas that they share with me.

The reactions of the audiences became nearly predictable and there was a pattern to them across all the works that I have described (*Deep Waters I, II* and *River*). My initial observations corresponded with Youngblood's notion of synesthetic cinema and his claim that

...it's not what we're seeing so much as the process and effect of seeing: that is, the phenomenon of experience itself, which exists only in the viewer [...]. One cannot photograph metaphysical forces. One cannot even "represent" them. One can, however, actually evoke them in the inarticulate conscious of the viewer (Youngblood 1970, 97).

Youngblood's reference to "the hypnotic draw to the fire" or the "spellbound gaze" is particularly suitable to the way the members of the audience appeared (91). Going further, one could compare their experience and reactions to "seeing the cathedrals in clouds", not thinking anything in particular but feeling somehow "secure and content" or what Youngblood also describes as the "oceanic effect", feeling attracted to the technologically mediated images of natural elements, in a mindless stare of wonder at the ocean or a lake or river (Youngblood 1970, 91).

In terms of the type of immersion that occurred in the exhibition context of this environment as a result of processes of scenographic unfolding, there were three types of space, hence three types of immersion which emerged, overlapped or fused in this process: (1) the natural environment where the phenomenon, such as the pulsing water ripple, may occur; (2) the studio where the transformation of the body / space relations and the material and technological mediation begin to take place; and (3) the exhibition context where the space of the gallery along with the audience are transformed by the material and technological mediation combining the first two types of immersion.

Previously, I have discussed the link between the first type of immersion in the natural environment and the second type of immersion within the exhibition context of the *River* installation. There, I referred to our attention and the whole perception apparatus being taken over by the phenomenon of the water rapids, and compared it to the way one becomes immersed in observing the motion of the river from a bridge to the way one becomes immersed in the environment of the coiling landscape of water patterns trapped in the cones. The two different temporalities, of the mind and the river, became not only the subject of the performance but also a means of forming the immersive aspect of the installation.

Similar processes occurred within the exhibition context of *Deep Waters II*. It was the immersion in the phenomenon of the water ripples in nature, caused by a rock falling into the depth and darkness of waters, that inspired the processes of scenographic unfolding as a transformation of body / space relations by means of material and technological mediation, resulting in the audience becoming immersed in the environment. While the communication of the phenomenon took place by different means, it resulted in a powerful experience where the performance of the water ripple formed not only an immersive performance but also the actual immersion within.

The third type of immersion I refer to here is the transformation of body / space relations between the types of immersion that occur in the studio and in an exhibition context. In the exhibition space, not unlike during the test sessions in my studio, I both observed and blurred with my work. However, in an exhibition context I also blurred with the audience in terms of understanding their responses to the work itself. My body as well as theirs were being pulled, physically and imaginatively, deeper towards the dimension of depth, experienced through movement and time. Whether this pulling was embodied by the horizontal falling of the rock, or the pulsing water ripple throughout the space of the environment, the outcomes remained the

same: immersion occurred as a result of having our entire attention and the whole perceptual apparatus captured by the phenomenon of the water ripple – through the way in which the material, the image and the bodies of the spectators interacted within the space of the installations.

In *Deep Waters II*, for example, some audience members stood in the middle of the work for a long time in complete silence, observing and blending with the performance of the water ripple. Others stood and observed before spreading their arms, as if attempting to “swim through it”. Then there were walking audiences. They chose to experience the work by moving their bodies within the dynamic movement of the performing ripple.

There were also audience members that connected with each other across the screens, realizing that they were all part of a pulsing environment, that they were also rippling as the flickering reflections of the projected light fell on their faces, hands or their entire bodies. Some audience members were playful, hiding in the darkness and then emerging within the performance of the water ripple. Some reached out for the flying rock, trying to catch its illusion. And then, of course, there were children who completely accepted and embraced this new dream-like world as their playground.

Audience members rarely connected with me in the dark space, nor did they approach me while inside. On the rare occasions, when I was introduced as the author of the work by a colleague or a friend within the working darkness of the space, there was a sense that the serenity and the silence of the environment needed to be maintained. This applied to *Deep Waters I, II* and *River*, where not only would talking disrupt the experience of the environment, but there would be a sense of discomfort as if having to suddenly wake up from a dream.

I did not engage with the audiences at the exit point either. The moment they walked out of the darkness of the installation, they were still within the experience, still processing, still holding

on to what was inside. Barthes refers to this particular state as “coming out of hypnosis” (Barthes 1989, 345). The audiences would walk out in silence and carried, or seemed to want to carry, that serenity away with them as far as they could. With some distance, however, they felt more open to sharing their experience.

When I did engage them afterwards, the conversation usually shifted towards their own experience within the space. They would tell me how they felt, many of them saying that they had never seen anything like that before. Complete strangers suddenly felt an almost personal connection with me and wanted to share their memories and experiences. Others provided endless ideas of what else I could do with these screens, or told me they wanted to do something similar or that they had thought about this idea before.

Regardless of this sudden connection with audiences, in reality, they entered into a process of shaping the work that was their own. Not unlike the “readers” whom Barthes refers to in his oft-cited essay, “The Death of the Author”, who felt a strong desire to become writers through the act of reading, *River* and *Deep Waters I, II* awakened in the audiences the urge to create (Barthes 1967) as they lost the boundaries between themselves and the materially and technologically mediated space they inhabited. Similarly, like Bachelard’s interpretation of the “bringing about a veritable awakening of poetic creation, in the soul of the reader, (the audience) through the reverberations of a single poetic image” (Bachelard xxiv), be it the phenomenon of the pulsing water ripple in *Deep Waters I, II* or the phenomenon of moving water rapids in the *River* exhibition, the audience had a strong desire to make the work their own.

2.4. Conclusion

Expanded forms of cinema evolve around viewing the bodies of the audience as an extension of the filmic apparatus in physical space, and as forms of body / mind screens with potentialities to

become the subject of the artwork. The “virtual condition”, a term established by Bruno which positions the understanding of materiality outside of materials themselves within the transformational process of reactivation, might be one way of understanding the materiality of the cinematic apparatus within these expanded forms.

This investigation, however, has attempted to go further, exploring the potentiality of such a virtual condition not only in the exhibition context but also within the creative process itself, through a shaping of spatio-corporeal relations that foster the transformation of viewers into body / mind screens. From this perspective, I have argued that the transformational processes engaged in body / space relations are not the outcome of the ‘virtual condition’ alone but occur as an unfolding of performance within processes of material / technological mediation. In other words, the work of enabling immersion to occur does not only take place within the space of the installation, but is constantly in the state of *becoming* within the manipulation of materials and media in the studio. To explore this process of becoming and to view how it arises from practice, I established and began to define a key term, scenographic unfolding, as a lens through which to view transformation of space / body within the space itself. I then explored the scenographic unfolding of the immersive environment in action, and tried to understand not only how the process of immersion unfolds in the space of the exhibition and the performance of the *environment*, but also throughout the entire process, from inception to dissemination.

For instance, in *Deep Waters II*, the pulsing water ripple is the subject of the performance; the multiple transparent screens frame the layers of the image and the immersive experience of this performance. The audience may enter the frame of the performance by blurring with the media, and even interacting with it to some degree by having it fall onto their bodies, but they do not, by themselves, become the subject of the exhibition or change its course. On the other hand, *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) by Anthony McCall, referred to earlier, is formed by the

volumetric filling of space with light due to particulates in the air; the only screen is at the end of the projection on the gallery wall. The moment the audience disturbs the volume of light with their body parts, they themselves become the screens. By physically entering the projected beam of light, unlike in *Deep Waters II*, they also become the subject, the material and the space itself. Yet, in something like *Line Describing the Cone*, while the audience may manipulate the light and hence, the space – they still remain fundamentally outside of it.

What has become apparent from this investigation is that there is a direct correlation between the type of media employed in forming the performance of the environment and the space / body relations, as well as the type and degree of immersion and performance it affords. Thus, in providing a context and a definition for scenographic unfolding, this chapter also projected a clear notion that the unfolding is a dynamic dimension, which in itself may lead to many forms of body / space relationships and expand not only the possibility of immersion (of the audience), but also their roles within the environment. Moving forward, how can the findings of this chapter be instrumental in advancing the performance to yet another level? In other words, how can we expand on these findings and go beyond the transformation of the audience and empower them with an increased autonomy of creation, and / or even expand their potential of becoming the *co-creators* of the work?

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Deep Waters I.

Deep Waters I. is an immersive environment formed by reflected light, architectural elements and water. The actual installation is composed of eight large water containers, five feet in diameter each, fabricated in 1/8" steel, positioned on the floor and filled with water. Above every water pool, there is a two-foot-long acrylic cylinder suspended from the ceiling. Alternatively, there may be a plumbing structure installed (in place of the cylinders), releasing a drop of water approximately every five seconds. The drops fall to the pools with a gentle tipping sound, breaking the water surface into ripples. These are being reflected, in their enlarged form, onto white vellum screens placed around the water containers. Viewers are invited to walk between the pools or sit on benches and experience the phenomena of the reflected light, movement, water and sound. The minimal nature of this work and all its elements are employed to embrace the preconceived notion of depth, which begins at the surface and continues to imaginary dimensions within the contemplative mind of the audience.

Link to work description: <http://www.lenkanovak.com/works/deep-water>

Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=62&v=Le9BT0zU18k

Duration of video: 1:22 min.

Technical Information:

6 theatre lights

8 steel water pools

8 acrylic water containers

Plumbing systems

Double sided vellum screens 360-degree perimeter of the gallery space

Credits

Date of Creation: 2006-2008

Lenka Nováková: Creation / Concept

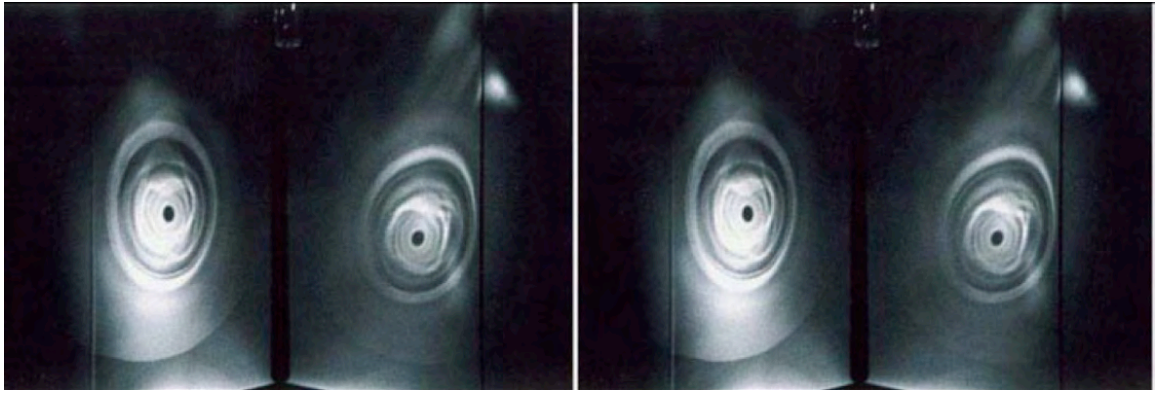
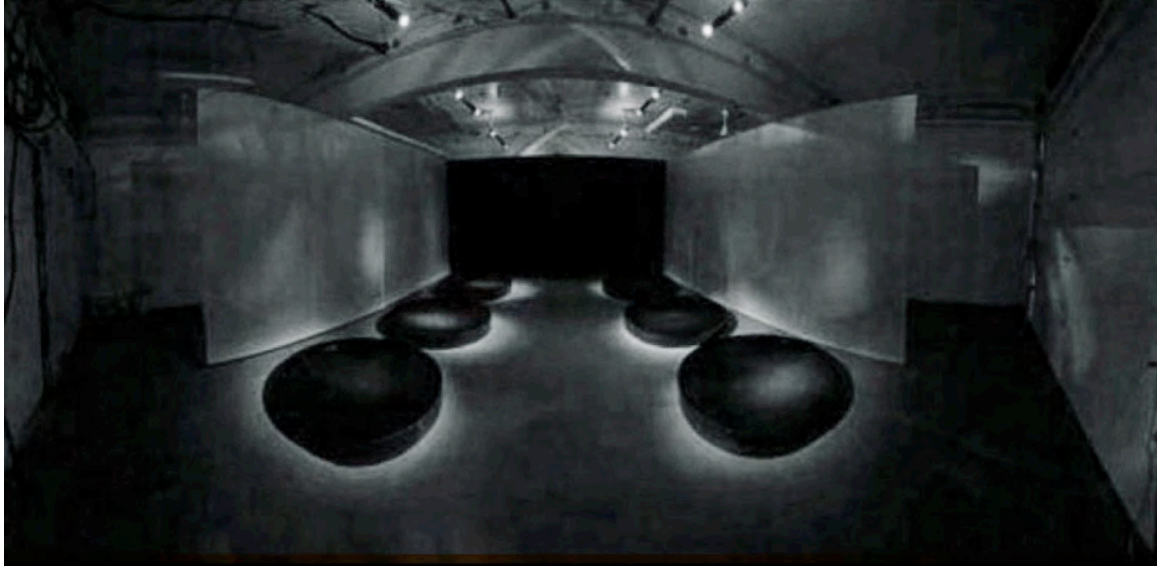
Francis Anjo: Assistance

photo/video credit © Lenka Nováková

Selected Exhibitions

NAC (Niagara Artist Run Centre), Saint Catherine's, ON, Canada <http://www.nac.org>

PAFA Museum of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, USA <http://www.pafa.org/museum>



Appendix B

Deep Waters II.

In *Deep Waters II.*, I explore the notion of depth and consequently the notion of a fall by employing an elaborate design of multiple projection screens to layer the projected image and recreate the lustrous, transparent and reflective qualities of a dark water surface. Eight minutes of looped video footage of rocks falling in the middle of the night into the quiet Schuylkill River is projected across and through eight large water-like screens. The screens are fabricated in monofilament, woven between two 8' x 8' aluminum bars. These are set in a row, approximately three feet apart, and create multiple repetitive images. The audience is invited to walk around and between the screens. The projected image captures the repeated action of rocks falling into the calm night river, breaking the water surface into a pulsing ripple of light before it proceeds towards the dark bottom. Every eight minutes the DVD goes dark and the screens return back to the appearance of a calm, uninterrupted water surface of the night. In this work, I attempt to explore the phenomenon of depth as imaginary and psychological dimension of the unknown and the invisible.

Link to work description: <http://www.lenkanovak.com/works/deep-waters-ii>

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TyODaYPpSg>

Duration of video: 0:43 min.

Technical Info:

8 screens 8' x 8' (stretched between the floor and ceiling)

2 projectors (same resolution/lumens)

1 DVD (audio and video) 8 minutes looped

(Darkened gallery space installation of black fabric)

Credits

Date of Creation: 2006-2008

Lenka Nováková - Concept/Creation

Marinko Jareb - Audio

Assistance: Francis Anjo

Photo/Video Credit © Lenka Novakova

Selected Exhibitions

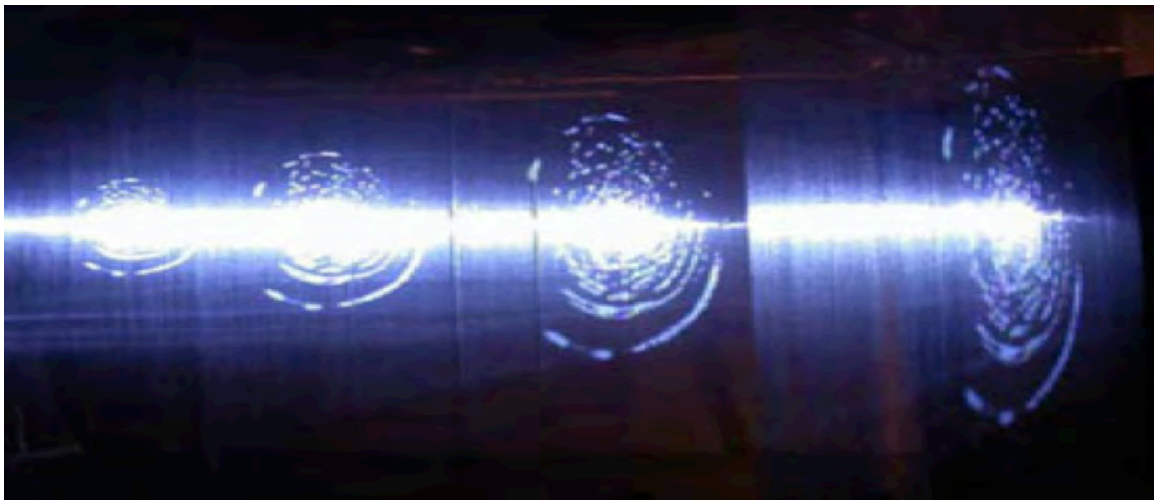
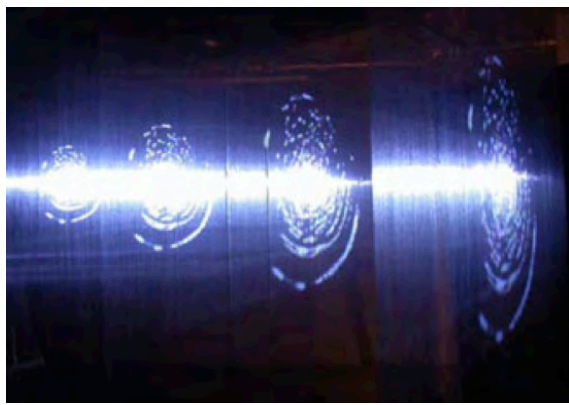
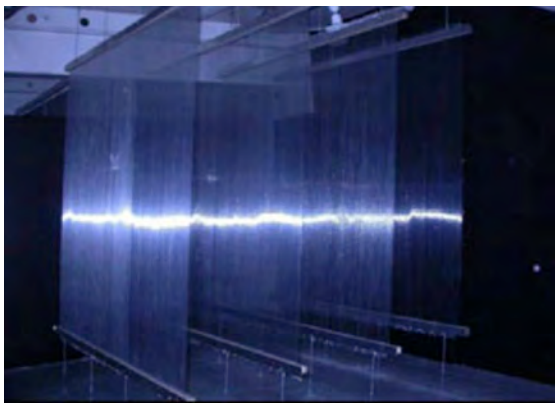
Niagara Artist Company, St. Catherine's, Canada <http://www.nac.org>

PAFA Museum of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, USA www.pafa.org/museum

Definitely Superior, Thunder Bay, ON, Canada www.definitelysu

Ed Video, Edifying Edifice, Festival of Moving Image, Guelph, ON, Canada

Espace F, Matane, QC, Canada <http://www.espacef.org>



Appendix C

River

River is an immersive installation transforming the entire gallery space along with the audience's bodies and minds into a submersive experience of a river current running through the darkened gallery space. The installation consists of multiple conic screens installed throughout the gallery, forming an inward-directed space and creating the premise for a possibility of perception which encompasses the viewers' entire physical being. The cones are suspended from the ceiling structure on a grid leaving approximately two-foot space in between for audiences to walk comfortably within the landscape of the installation. The number of the units varies from twenty-eight to forty-two according to the availability of space.

Link to work description: <http://www.lenkanovak.com/works/river>

Link to video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NegaGg--7o0>

Link to video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpZfPOPINWU>

Duration of video 1. 33 min.

Duration of video 2. 1:22 min.

Technical Information:

4 projectors

4 DVD players

1 DVD (8 min loop)

36 conical glass structures

Credits

Date of Creation: 2009

Lenka Nováková: concept, creation

CIAM <http://www.ciam-arts.org/>

OAC <http://www.arts.on.ca/site4.aspx>

Photo/video credit © Lenka Nováková

Selected Exhibitions

Fofa Gallery, Montreal, QC, Canada fofagallery.concordia.ca/ehhtml/2009/11lenkanovakova.h

Canada, Hexagram Black Box, Montreal, QC, Canada hexagram.concordia.ca

Grimsby Public Art Gallery, Grimsby, ON, Canada grimsbypublicartgallery.blogspot.ca

Estevan Art Gallery and Museum, Estevan, SK, Canada www.estevanartgallery.com

Gallery de Matane, Matane, QC, Canada <http://www.galerieartmatane.org>

Definitely Superior, Thunder Bay, ON, Canada <http://www.definitelysuperior.com/>

Musee d'Art Contemporain de Baie – Saint Paul, QC, Canada <http://www.macbsp.com>

WKP Kennedy Art Gallery, North Bay, ON, Canada <http://www.kennedygallery.org>

