

**Inhabiting remote spaces:  
an aesthetic of the inter-human**

Steve Hollingsworth

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Royal Conservatoire of Scotland  
&  
University of St Andrews



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A portfolio of 7 bodies of original works  
A commentary of 15,132 words  
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## Abstract

This PhD submission addresses these questions: What are the creative possibilities of body, light, time and sound combinations, when the implications of profound perceptual subjectivity are acknowledged? What is the creative potential of working with profound and multiply learning-disabled people (PMLD)? What are the creative possibilities and outcomes when ideas arrived at in this field, are taken back into a wider art context of exhibitions and live performances? Working as an Artist for Edinburgh charity Artlink, I slowly discovered a hidden constellation of ideas. Through developing a mutable and shape-shifting aesthetic, based on combinations of light, sound, time and the body, I found I was able to relate to people with profound disability. The methodology is embodied in the practice, through the media of performance, film and installation together with allowing the working process to lead idea development. Using my responsiveness to detail, collaborating and sharing ideas, and working in an open-ended, intuitive way led to the seven works discussed in the commentary. The use of performance was initiated by the realisation that, the main mutable material I had in the moment (within workshops with PMLD people) was the potential of my own body, to accentuate and interact with people, using other materials and to produce sound through my voice. Through these means, I was able to provide spontaneous live art experiences for those with profound neural differences to me. By tuning my aesthetic sensitivities to them and by stretching and sustaining events through time, new aesthetic experiences could persist more (as memories) for those, that process sensory inputs at a much reduced pace. As a result, ideas of time and duration, the body, light (neon) and sound became the common elements of the work discussed and evolve throughout each piece within the commentary. Common to all of the works are ideas of how we actually form meaning from the world through our senses. Philosophical ideas often inform the process of making work as an initial material to form starting points. Working alongside Jim Colquhoun led to the formation of the collaborative practice, 'Two Ruins,' which became an open space for exploring improvisation and performance. A further collaboration with musician Alison McGillivray was developed to challenge and explore vulnerability and critique ideas of virtuosity within the Conservatoire. The portfolio of work denies any straightforward linear interpretation, intentionally. This is achieved by the multitude of references within the work and is activated by combinations of slow-time, light, body and sound. These unfold in physically remote locations or are separated from the viewer by time being sustained through performance. This strategy ensures the work can withstand sustained engagement by a viewer, trying to unravel the many threads of meaning they are confronted by.

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## 1. Introduction

This PhD submission comprises seven works.

They are:

- *Two Ruins* at CCA, Glasgow & the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow.
- *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club, Glasgow.
- *Blind Sight* at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow
- *The Hyperboreans* at Queens Park Railway Club, Glasgow.
- *The Profane Illuminations* at Queens Park Railway Club, Glasgow.
- *A Voyage to Arcturus* at Lydgalleriet, Bergen, Norway.
- *Blind Spot* at Tulca Festival, Galway.

Throughout these works, a play with meaning and the possibilities of subjective understanding, underpin the work. The *remote spaces* in the title acknowledges this by referring to the physical spaces and locations and contexts the work takes place in. The consciousness of the viewer is also a *remote space* that might be altered, or a perception shifted by an encounter with the work. Ambiguity is also attendant on different levels. The locations the video work unfolds in can be read as either real or dreamlike, co-existing as mental or physical spaces. Equally, the activities in the films resist a straightforward interpretation. The work is intended to be immediately arresting, to draw an audience in. By using visually seductive elements such as neon (which is a material common to all of the works) together with sound, a viewer's attention can be captured in the moment.

The intention is that the work could fill the viewer's mind with a multitude of sensory potential for them to engage with and consider. The *inter-human* in the title extends this by inviting a viewer to think about potential connections between them and the work and also those between myself and Jim Colquhoun (our interior spaces are open to interpretation as we never speak). The *inter-human*, also refers to the collaborative nature of the work. All of the work here has arisen through collaborations I have entered into with other people. This involved sharing ideas between myself and others and subsequently led into the final pieces of work in this submission. Collaboration allows a combination of voices and ideas to bear

upon a working process. All the works, bar one, concern the collaboration named *Two Ruins* that developed between myself, Jim Colquhoun and Patrick Jameson who runs the gallery space, Queens Park Railway Club<sup>1</sup>, and who also became a collaborator through his role in filming several of the pieces. *The Blind Sight* performance arose through working with musician, Alison McGillivray.

One main aspect of all the work is that it seeks to engage with the perceptions of a viewer. Time is stretched to sustain moments by using slow movement during performances and videos. These ideas came into focus as a useful creative mode during my workshop experiences with multiply disabled adults. The work also resists linear readings; filled with references, it encourages someone engaging with the work to be an active participant in the act of forming meaning. Gaps in text and deletion are strategies used to keep a viewer active in the work. This allows slippage and ambiguity into the process of engaging with the work as meaning is fugitive and subjective. The body, light and sound are the common elements in each work. The artificial light of neon is used widely throughout the works as sculptural elements and as an original material to produce crude electronic sound from. As performers our bodies activate the work either as live presences in front of an audience or within the film pieces, remotely.

The work submitted for this PhD was inspired by the new directions I had to forge to create meaningful aesthetic experiences for people with profound and multiple disabilities. It is not a body of work illustrating disability. The experiences I have had with disabled people, challenged my notions of what I thought the boundaries of art were, and also gave me a lens of difference to rethink aesthetic registers. In this context I learnt that meaning is contingent on what we can actually perceive and process to form meaning. I consider art and aesthetics vital in order to see aspects of the world from new perspectives, similarly, trying to understand minds with difference allows us to consider other modes of human experience. In turn, this can open up new ways to see the world, that can make us reconsider our own fragile connections to each other and the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Queens Park Railway Club is an artist run gallery in the Victorian waiting room on Glasgow's Queens Park Station platform which the Cathcart train line runs through: <https://www.queensparkrailwayclub.co.uk>. It is programmed and run by Patrick Jameson and Ellis Luxemburg.

## 2. Contextual Background

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 8 to 12)

I have worked with the disability arts charity Artlink<sup>2</sup> (Edinburgh and the Lothians) since 2005, working as an artist in experimental, open-ended workshops and sharing ideas with other artists, creating contemporary live-art, to reach a range of profoundly and multiply learning-disabled people (PMLD) - people not normally considered as a viable audience or vehicle for art production. The ambition within these weekly workshops is to use art making as a process, to relate to those with profound difference by creating, tangible, bespoke, aesthetic experiences, bespoke, for them. Working over a period of many years and being increasingly aware of the details of reactions from people with PMLD, I have slowly developed meaningful exchanges, based in art and aesthetics that can stretch their perceptions, abilities and hopefully enable renewed agency and engagement with the world.

This unique context initially challenged me and my existing practice a great deal. It caused me to reflect and created a pressing need, to evolve new ways of working. It catalysed a break from previous aesthetic habits and, in turn, made me think deeply about the potential for art and the contexts it can operate in. Thinking through, the perceptive and cognitive differences of people profoundly different from me, brought about many new considerations in thinking about how we all experience the world. Importantly, I started to realise the potential my own body held, as a key means to accentuate meaning, through performance as it was the most direct 'material' available. Within workshops, I started exaggerating aspects of my whole body, voice and movement, to inhabit the space with accentuation. These changes allowed me to respond in the moment and provide immediate experiences for a person with disability, in arousing their curiosity. Using myself as a spontaneous, mutable material took me away from reliance on static objects or images, making me the focus. Working alongside another artist within this context emphasised the importance of

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<sup>2</sup> Artlink, Edinburgh, has been active for over 25 years in pioneering collaborative research within communities of care. Within the Ideas Team project, ideas and practices have radiated from artists engaging with a small group of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and their carers in a Midlothian day centre called Cherry Road Leaning Centre: <https://www.artlinkedinburgh.co.uk/>  
<https://cherryroadlearningcentre.com/our-vision/>

collaboration as a way to share ideas and drive them forward together which enriched the overall potential of the work. This opened up new ways of working that I found compelling. I first met Jim Colquhoun (artist and writer) within this fascinating area, where art and aesthetics cross fertilise with disability and care. We began discussing and reflecting on these experiences together, devising strategies and new ways of working together. Taking what we had learnt together in the workshops and feeling the potential to expand this out into a wider context of gallery exhibitions and performances led to our collaborative practice being formed - Two Ruins.

Artlink's remit is to put people with profound and multiple learning disabilities together with artists in live workshop situations. Art becomes a way of being together in the moment and a medium to communicate, by creating aesthetic spaces that evolve over time. Working in this area I came to realise that I would have to rethink my ideas quite radically so that work would be meaningful to this unique demographic. An art object has little relevance if a viewer cannot see, for example. Overall, I had to consider how I could relate to people with profoundly different ways of being in the world to myself. By constantly pushing myself and using what was to hand (by improvising with materials) I found I could develop time based, performative interactions that seemed to be perceivable by people with PMLD and hold their attention.

Slowly absorbing the unique differences that individuals with PMLD have, I started to realise that I see the world through my own familiar, embedded normality. Thinking about people with PMLD, and the way they experience the world, caused me to consider what *their* possible realities might be, and in doing so, enabled me to create new aesthetic approaches. This led me to think more about the potential of performance and improvisation through using my body as a means to express ideas. Working with Jim Colquhoun in this context, we discovered together that the ability to improvise in the moment and reacting to the fleeting responses of participants almost *necessitated* the need to start using performance in a considered and vital way. Determining our actions from reactions we received (if we caused a smile or became the focus of attention) led to slowly learning a new aesthetic sensibility by making ourselves and our existing practice vulnerable to the perceptions and ways of being of workshop participants in order to move forward. This approach gave us a means to create meaningful exchanges for the people we were working with - rather than imposing pre-formed ideas of 'art activities,' which would not have been appropriate to their abilities or

perceptions. Trying to relate to people who inhabit the world with difference (who are unable to communicate using spoken language) provided me with a catalyst to rethink my ideas and approaches to making work. The more I tried to absorb from people with profound difference to me (by being sensitive to their responses) the more open I became in giving myself over to the experiences I was encountering without prejudice. I developed an awareness and openness of different perspectives, on how we each potentially perceive the world in different ways. This context is a unique and fascinating area in which art has been shown to have an empowering and enabling effect – when, importantly, it is derived *directly* from trying to understand a disabled person’s unique lived experience of being in the world. Trying to see the world through the eyes of each individual I have worked with, has been vital in developing new ways to work within workshop contexts and has influenced my practice as a whole. I discovered that interactions have to be *stretched* through time, in order to be understood by the disabled people we were working with, to fit *their* time of understanding, to ensure that events did not elude them before they had the actual time to process them. Thinking about time and how we experience its passing, is a crucial element in my work with PMLD people. Considering how it can be almost *slowed down* or *congealed* or made less fleeting through an experience of art (that *persists* and unfolds with a much-reduced pace) we found that by performing extremely slowly or by using sounds such as drones, we were able to *thicken* a perception of time that could then be perceived and enjoyed.

Reflecting on this has been an ongoing process and constantly raises fascinating questions. Thinking openly about time has been important to development of the work contained in this commentary. Moving very slowly, almost to the point of stasis, has been one of the ways of working developed within workshops, that has been taken into the work of ‘Two Ruins’. Attempting to hold moments in time, can serve to mark a separation and accentuate the slowed time of the work and the ‘normal’ time of a viewer. People with brain injuries can often experience time much more slowly than the neurotypical. Therefore, people with disability often need experiences in *their* time of understanding that can then form a new memory. Having almost intuited that this was the case from working in this area for a sustained period, and then having it confirmed through talking to vision expert, Professor Gordon Dutton<sup>3</sup> led me to focusing more on the possibilities of stretching time, through

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Gordon Dutton was Consultant Ophthalmologist at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow for over twenty years and is now Emeritus Professor of Vision Science at Glasgow Caledonian University. He

performance, to reach people. I continued to meet Gordon throughout my PhD to learn about his unique approaches and thorough knowledge of how we see with the brain. The eyes being one mode of input, he told me about Daniel Kish<sup>4</sup> who is completely blind yet teaches his method of echolocation, which enables people to activate their visual brain to *see* through perceiving sound reflected off objects. Daniel can effectively ‘see’ and can even determine foliage and differing surfaces by processing his reflected echoes with his visual brain. Gordon described how we see from inside to out, and paint the world with our own perceptions, i.e. we impose on what we see, prior knowledge of concepts we have encountered that we unconsciously remember when we see. We do not perceive passively - we impose our previous experience on our visual perception. Colour, for instance, is not a quality ‘out in the world’ it exists only in our brains, as it converts differing wavelengths of light into experiences of colour. Professor Dutton is an expert in Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI). His detailed approach in getting as much information as possible from parents and patients has enabled him to understand the inner perceptions of those with cerebral damage and to offer solutions to rarely understood conditions. Much of this knowledge has a grounding in WW1, where injured soldiers came back with bullet wounds to parts of the brain which produced odd visual anomalies that had not been encountered by the medical establishment before. Gordon impressed upon me the importance of not imposing my own visual normality onto the severely disabled people I work with. Crucially, he also stressed that my processing speed was out of step with the people I encounter during my workshop sessions. He impressed upon me, that I should slow my interactions down ‘to match’ the processing speed of a profoundly disabled person in order to have a meaningful connection. The traditional medical model always privileges the lack when encountering people with profound and multiple disability, what people *cannot* do. Very rarely does it stress what *can* be worked with and developed over time with patience and sensitivity. Through Gordon, I met Helen St. Clair-Tracy, who adopted his approaches and consequently set up CVI Scotland<sup>5</sup> as a resource to disseminate his ideas.

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has been widely published. I met him in the context of severe learning disability when he spoke to several of us from Artlink (interview in the appendix).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Kish lost his eyes to a childhood cancer before he was 13 months old. Intuitively he started using echolocation to discover his environment and now teaches his method worldwide.

<sup>5</sup> CVI Scotland is an organisation devoted to helping people understand Cerebral Visual Impairment and is a vast resource of helpful information for those that want to inform themselves to help others.

Helen has a learning-disabled son who had been effectively written off as unable to learn by the medical establishment. By slowing down the way she spoke to her son, stretching words so that the sounds matched her sons processing speed she has gradually, through great patience and care, taught him to speak.

On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019, I asked Gordon this question via email:

I wondered: In what way is memory a key part of perception? Especially in regard of PMLD?  
The below is his response (Dutton, personal communication, 2019)

*Wow. Where does one start.*

*My perspective is that the whole of auditory and visual perception is founded upon memory. Whether it is hearing what someone has said and knowing what it means, or whether it is recognition of an object or a person, the whole act of doing so is founded upon seeking an internal memory match.*

*In the context of PMLD the success that Helen St Clair-Tracy has had in turning her son round from being unable to understand anything, to being able to become partially independent is entirely down to the fact that he could not learn because of simultanagnosia limiting his vision to single elements of the scene and his slow mental processing limiting his auditory learning to very slowly emitted speech.*

*The dual act of naming the single element he was perceiving with prolonged iteration of words (including prolongation of each consonant), enabled him for the first time (at the age of 6 years) to build up memory banks with which to start to make sense of his world instead of being entirely locked into a world of gobbledegook. He even said, 'uv oo um' (I love you mum) a few weeks ago. In other word's he is not autistic. He has even been able to gain theory of mind.*

*I've taught this methodology for over 30 years with great success by parents with the patience to apply it, but I am almost a lone voice in the wilderness (along with you of course).*

*One can only learn from what one can perceive with meaning.*

Rethinking what a meaningful aesthetic could be for PMLD people, by using physical materials in combination with performance, and improvising together with light and sound, in an attempt to hold people's attention and interest, goes to the core of the work. This way of working is primarily about learning *from* and having flexibility and sensitivity in the moment to someone with profound difference and then being conscious to what they may be feeling and experiencing.

This approach is about the possibilities art has, to make us *feel* aesthetic experiences together and in time, from differing perspectives and acknowledging our common humanity despite difference. Disability and difference can almost melt away when a connection is made between myself and a person with disability, being together for a short period of time can mean a memory might sustain and have the potential for new meaning to occur.

Turning a negative, Victorian word, *Cripple* into the shortened *Crip* to be a term of empowerment, Crip theory provides those with disability a space of activism to explore positively, issues of disability from sexuality to identity to political representation. Whilst I fully recognise the intrinsic value in Crip theory and practice in overturning outdated notions of able-bodiedness as being the only bodies of potential value in society and by increasing visibility of a marginalised group, I have not included these reference points in this commentary. These are complex arguments and I feel they are not able to be understood by the individuals who I have encountered with severe and multiple disability. They are not aware of the existence of such a body of thought and is therefore invisible to them. It is also not relevant to my own art practice as I am not making political statements about disability. Rather, my work draws on my experiences as an artist with Artlink that has informed my aesthetic in moving toward performance combined with other media and in considering the role duration and slowed time can have.

In my work with Artlink, I try to help PMLD people express agency and choice by creating work that is grounded in *their* experience of the world, by trying, over time to discover what *their normal* is, not my own. Identity is crucial though; we all have a narrative identity, a life story that we can communicate to others. If PMLD people have opportunities to express themselves independently, they can have the power to change their life story, as it is often imposed by others onto them, as PMLD often have literally no voice.



Ben, for example, is a PMLD young man who was marginalised in the day-care centre where I first met him. Through an Artlink Ideas Team project I worked with Gordon Dutton (to assess his vision) and a Psychologist who observed Bens reactions to my interactions with him. Using the knowledge gained of Ben over time and noting what he reacted to positively, I worked with Dr Lauren Hayes<sup>6</sup> to create some bespoke software called The Sensorium<sup>7</sup>. Using a joystick, Ben can now manipulate projected images and sound himself. Remarkably, when I showed Ben's mother footage of Ben using the Sensorium, she was amazed at what he could do and also the length of time her son was engaged for. By learning from Ben about his experience of the world to inform a bespoke artwork, he was able to have agency and rewrite his narrative identity in relation to his mother's previous expectations of him.

I believe artists have a unique contribution to offer in working with people with PMLD as they have a capacity to be critically aware of details and use this as material to drive ideas. In doing this in the context of severe disability they have the power to reimagine the inner worlds of the severely disabled and can therefore help such people experience the world with deeper meaning.

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<sup>6</sup> Dr Lauren Hayes is a researcher with an interest in music, computing and haptic interfaces.

<sup>7</sup> The Ripple effect was written in response to Ideas Team projects at Artlink, including The Sensorium. [https://www.artlinkedinburgh.co.uk/2018/11/the-ripple-effect-reception-and-report-launch/the-ripple-effect-artlink-report-2018\\_page\\_01/](https://www.artlinkedinburgh.co.uk/2018/11/the-ripple-effect-reception-and-report-launch/the-ripple-effect-artlink-report-2018_page_01/) The Sensorium project is also discussed in a paper, written by myself, Instituto Mesa, Brazil, 2019: [http://institutomesa.org/RevistaMesa\\_5/portfolio/steve-hollingsworth-en/?lang=en](http://institutomesa.org/RevistaMesa_5/portfolio/steve-hollingsworth-en/?lang=en). Entitled, *Experiencing the Senses in Slow Time: Cherry Road Learning Centre*. Steve Hollingsworth, 2019, the paper is also included in the appendix.

A number of artists, whose ideas have had a significant effect on my thinking, have worked outside of traditional gallery spaces. The Artists Placement Group (APG) was formed in 1965 by Barbara Steveni who collaborated with her husband and artist, John Latham (1921-2006). With the key message that 'Context is half the work', the aim was to place artists in new contexts, such as commercial and industrial companies and government run organisations. The intention of APG was to enable artists to produce work away from a gallery context, engage with existing social relations, and also enable artists to work with an open brief. This ensured that an artist could develop work and ideas in an open fluid way driven by process, intuition and experimentation and thus be free from having an expected outcome by the host institution.

In his own practice, Latham was fascinated by consciousness, perception and how we understand time. He believed that physics and other areas of science had failed to take into account human existence and therefore, human experience, within their belief structures. Latham theorised that the universe was *time based* rather than space based; he believed that entities from objects to thought, are unified by being an 'event' with a 'time-base' or duration.

Through his dissatisfaction with traditional subject-object relations he wanted to stimulate action rather than silent contemplation on the part of a viewer. This ethos is at play within Artlink workshops that involve people within the production of a temporary work where interactions and energies are exchanged between people. Latham was convinced that art could bring about positive social change and should therefore try and enter all areas of society. To this end, The Artists Placement Group was a natural extension for ideas to be placed within a wider social arena. Latham came up with the notion of an 'incidental person' as a term to describe the intentions of artists engaging in the social field.

'In Latham's view, the prerequisite for socio-political change is an improvement in communication between individual disciplines and wider contexts'  
(Conzen-Meairs, 1991, p.30)

Another key artist who produced work under APG was Ian Breakwell (1943-2005). Breakwell was interested in narrative, accident and the everyday, and he worked across a range of media. For APG he worked with Age Concern and produced 'Memory and Reminiscence Aids' an audio project with older people. Work produced under APG could also be seen as highly controversial and threatening to the host institution. Ian Breakwell had

a further placement at in the Department for Health and Social Security (DHSS), based in the area of mental health and proposed radical, root and branch change. Latham always spoke in interviews of his desire to work directly with 'a total context of people'. He strove to push the boundaries of what might constitute visual art out of the gallery and into areas where art might previously have been understood to have no role.

There are similarities between Latham's ideas and those of French Philosopher Henri Bergson<sup>8</sup> (1859-1941). He is best known for privileging human lived experience over the rational, yet abstract nature of science which he saw as removed from our daily subjective experiences in seeking to quantify experience. Bergson was concerned with exploring the human experience of time. In his book *Time and Free Will*, he argued that scientific 'machine time' is foreign to our daily human experience of temporality, where our consciousness extends from the present to the future and the past, all co-existing together as memories and future possibilities. To visualise this, Bergson used the example of an inverted cone, the most distant memories exist at the base of the cone and the present moment in time, at the tip. Bergson was also troubled by the idea that, if the scientific method were extended (to explain our existence through time by rational measurement of our emotions and actions) there was a danger that it might serve to erase our humanity by turning us into mathematically measurable and therefore predictable robots. By embodying the rationalism of numbers and accountancy, human beings could be treated as 'things'.

French conceptual artist Pierre Huyghe is similarly fascinated by time and uses his work to reposition and question our experience of it. Huyghe invented the concepts 'freed time' and 'the open present' a responsive space where anything can happen. In 1994 Huyghe formed 'The Association of Freed Time' as a creative space to critique the blurring of free time as opposed to working time, where technology has arguably, led to these distinctions becoming fractured, as capitalist systems have moved more to service industries and work has bled into traditional free time. An early work called 'Trajet' (Image. 5 in documentation appendix) was a performance piece that took place in Paris in 1992. This was simply a large van with big windows which contained a motorised treadmill on which a pedestrian walked as the van drove around the urban streets. The journey was at night and the interior of the van was

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<sup>8</sup> Henri Bergson, his most well know works are *Time and Free Will* 1889 and *Matter and Memory* 1896.

illuminated so that the walking performer could be viewed, as the van followed the route the performer took to work ordinarily.

The piece for me, conflates two normally separate times: the performers normal walking commute now being exhibited whilst being simultaneously transported at greater speed to critique the commuter, worker and the time of his labour and in turn the compressions and expansions of time we experience in our daily lives.

‘Trajet overwrites travel as surplus labour with travel as pleasure, whilst preserving both ends of the spectrum in the process’ (Barkin, 2015)

A reading of Georges Bataille (1897-1962) an important and influential thinker and writer, can provide another point of entry to the work by thinking about excess energy as a creative mode. He discusses these ideas and reimagines an economic system in *The Accursed Share* (1989). Jim Colquhoun and I also took into our work the notion of the *l’informe*<sup>9</sup> (the formless) which in our interpretation, gave us license to play with combinations of sound, light and movement with improvisation at the core, in an open, free, way. This was an attempt to free ourselves of self-imposed aesthetic restrictions and a wish to chase the moment. Using theory and an open-ended process allowed chance and accident to play a part in the working process. Bataille used his notion of *l’informe* to remove art from its privileged cultural status and celebrate its debasement to increase the potential for energetic creativity.

‘I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically’ (Bataille, 1989, p.21)

The excess of energy that Bataille writes of, can be seen throughout the work, and in the first piece, ‘Two Ruins’ at CCA, where neon light explodes into a formless chaotic sound, created from performing with neon light, activated by our bodies.

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<sup>9</sup> Bataille first wrote about *l’informe* in *Documents* 1929-30 a surrealist journal. The concept was further developed by Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois in an exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris 1996, *Formless: A User’s Guide*.

Human beings have a profound need to be understood. Working with people who are severely disabled revealed to me the complex levels and ways we all relate to each other and our environments regardless of disability. The work discussed in the commentary is multi-layered and multi-sensory. My hope is that as a body of work, it could provide an interesting tangle of thought and ideas for a viewer. That on being stimulated visually and aurally, they might temporarily lose themselves in the work and grasp some of these common threads of existence and thirst for meaning and meanings that continue to captivate me.

### 3. *Nothingness*

Creative text written reflection on the first Two Ruins performance.

This was written as a creative means to reflect on what I felt whilst performing and addresses the aesthetic space I became part of, separate from the audience. It also made me consider what it must be like to be in the world with little agency. I wrote with consideration to the people I have met during my Artlink workshop experiences in attempting to find a way to join these separate worlds, creatively. I put this text here, to allow a reader access to a kind of altered mind-set before engaging with the following work. The work also references the main concerns of the PhD submission, namely, *time*, *body*, *light* and *sound*. It is therefore an articulation of the question of the entire PhD: What are the creative possibilities of combinations of body, light, time and sound?

I can't really remember how I came to be here, all my memories are clouded, indistinct, out of reach, out of focus and painfully distant, so distant now I have nothing with which to orientate myself or to hold on to, adrift without any kind of compass or map. It's difficult to even grasp at my past now, or any past for that matter—who I was, what I did, where I came from, who knew me, how I kept going and what gave my life meaning, everything (whatever it was) is gone. And yet, I don't feel unhappy, I think I have emotions and can feel internally as well as what I can detect through my body, through my ears and eyes, what I can touch. I haven't broken down, I don't feel hungry, I'm not thirsty, I'm not too hot or too cold. I don't feel uncomfortable. Wherever I am and whatever purpose I am being put to, I feel sustained somehow. I don't know where the nourishment comes from, I never eat or drink or reach a point where I'm starving or dying of thirst, somehow all this is taken care of. Perhaps it flows from the sound or the weird white light that bleeds everywhere and obliterates any edge. Where I am could be anywhere, I can't see walls, edges, shapes or definition. The nothingness is overwhelming, this is what causes me anxiety. If I have any hunger at all it is to make sense of it, why, who, where, what? All I really want is to make sense of my predicament, what is the purpose, what is the thinking, what is the ideology, philosophy, is there anything more than this? Am I stuck here, what am I free to do?

## Time

I think about the presences here, what presses upon me beyond the awareness of my own body and thoughts. On the continuum here are two main elements, this odd penetrating sound that envelops everything, it's everywhere and very physical, I can feel it, it surrounds me and feels a part of me, it doesn't remind me of anything in particular but as it feels like a part of me, it somehow holds me and comforts me. It keeps me from grasping on to anything, it penetrates everything and prevents me from making sense of anything, physically shaking me off, leaving me floating, the vibrations repelling anything concrete that might crystallize, grow and show me something more. I'm in a cycle of perpetual becoming, the journey goes on, but I never arrive. I have no awareness of time, either of it passing, of there being a lot of it or not enough. Of it being unbearable, of it running out, I just hang here, in between but unaware of what I'm next to, like an invisible dimension I can't push through the membrane to anywhere else.

## Body

All I have is this room, if it is a room, gravity pulling my body to the floor. I can feel my own weight. I sometimes feel I can imagine a past but as soon as a thought enters my head that might be a memory, or even a memory of a memory it fails to coalesce into anything substantial, erased by the sound, knocked off kilter and knocked off any map of sense.

## Light

So, what do I do here? I do seem to have some kind of drive, a compulsion, a passion even, although I don't know if it could be called free will, a free choice, gainful employment. I'm always on the floor on all fours, the white light emanates from thin glass tubes and act as some kind of magnet to me, I'm drawn toward them. Sometimes I look so closely at them all I can see is a field of white, nothing else, intense glowing, pure white light. It seems to purify everything, bleaching all else away. It too seems a part of me like the sound, emanating toward me but also from me. I find myself staring into this white void, my head empty of everything but the sensations of sound and the light. I stare at one tube then move onto the next, time doesn't seem to figure in the way that I divide my time equally between sources of light, I just find myself moving among these fragments and move on to the next.

## Sound

As I slowly move among these glass fragments, each one emanating a blinding white light, like staring at an arc of vivid powerful, raw electricity, the sound alters, it seems to respond to my movement across each tube. I can't put my finger on a tone or pitch, but the sound changes, nonetheless. As I crawl approaching a tube it seems to anticipate my arrival by emitting a high roar, it gets higher as I close in. The sound reaches a crescendo as I hover directly over. Like the sound of all the oceans crashing over immense mountain ranges the sound washes over me, enveloping me, the sound waves animating my movements. I seem free to move but the sound waves seem to hold me and urge me forward to discover new utterances from these shards of white.



#### 4. *Two Ruins*

CCA, Glasgow; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2011); Sonica, Glasgow (2012)  
(Images in documentation appendix, pages 13 to 19)

For this first performance I wanted to use neon to create sound. I had previously made a piece where sounds from a radio activated neon but couldn't be heard, for a project at Nomi's Kitchen<sup>10</sup> called Social Soup, in 2010 (images 6, 7, 8) and this led to me considering if sound could be produced directly from neon. After a period of experimentation, a bespoke device was made for me that could react to the magnetic field of illuminated neon and convert it to sound through a simple oscillator. When the proximity oscillator is held over an illuminated neon tube, a tone is produced that varies in pitch depending how close it is, to the tube.

Myself and Jim, named our collaborative practice, *Two Ruins*. Inspired by Rose MacAulay's book, 'Pleasure of Ruins' (MacAulay 1953). Subsequently, the first performance piece was eponymously called, *Two Ruins*.

For this first performance (in the CCA Creative Lab on 23rd November 2011, (see Documentation Appendix p.15-16) I obtained several lengths of discarded white neon that had been fabricated but not been needed. These were laid on the floor of the creative lab randomly but evenly distributed. This created a lattice of glowing white lines to perform over. Spontaneously, we decided to be bare-chested and using electrical tape, affixed a proximity oscillator at sternum height on each of us. We decided we would crawl very slowly, carefully and delicately among the tubes. Creating sound by hovering our chests closely over the neon at the same time as trying to avoid breaking the fragile glass tubes. We intended to improvise the performance as we went along and to embrace whatever might happen.

To an audience we probably looked like workmen, both bare-chested, referencing arduous, hot work, wearing jeans, further connotes manual labour. We seem entirely absorbed in a slow and laborious task, with an intense concentration. Moving slowly and methodically (as

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<sup>10</sup> Nomi's Kitchen was a project by artist Karena Nomi based in her Glasgow flat. For Social Soup, the idea was for the exhibition to accumulate work over the course of the show. It started with one work and soup for the audience. The next day there was another opening as another artist added a piece until the exhibition ended.

if the combination of bright white light and sound slows us down, like walking through deep water) the task we are engaged in appears to be, mining neon light, converting it to sound, creating an inversion. Our pale torsos reflect the purity of white light. When the light dies, our movement ceases, and the performance comes to an end. We seemed to inhabit a simplistic yet highly sensory, overwhelming world. Here, the combination of sound and light is raw, stripped back, almost uncontrollable, lacking any specific detail. Together, our purpose seems to be, to make sense, of the fragments we crawl over. For an audience, this might raise questions about what the imbalance of light and sound might amount to? There is an abundance of different energies at play here and the audience might ask, is the work driven toward finding an equilibrium between them or to find some resolution among the registers of light, sound and bodies, engaged in the performance? What are they working toward?

The use of neon can signify in a multitude of ways, usually through text as signage that can be read, but also in more subtle ways through its use in film. It inhabits our imagination on multiple levels with references to time and the future. In this performance, the neon sections were from an un-used casino sign and were large sections of curved white lines, not text, probably to highlight the edges of architectural features of an unknown building.

The central theme of the work for me is the fundamental search for significance, not just in the work itself but in a wider context - how human beings create meaning. We as performers, are obsessively, slowly and methodically, moving over the neon fragments trying to find traces of sense or something fundamentally important us, striving for some fundamental element of meaning.

The entire piece could reference a kind of tabula rasa, an erased tablet, blanked out to the basic registers of light and sound, like a visual and audible white noise. A new starting point for meaning perhaps. It is almost as if the piece is about sensory bombardment and the assault of meaning we confront every day via a multitude of media. Where do we find truth and significance for ourselves in a sea of overwhelming stimulation? As performers we were consumed by the intensity of light and sound, almost as a test to the audience, to establish if they could withstand the aural and visual onslaught.

The sound provides another sensory register, as a counterpoint to vision, invisible yet unavoidable. Filling the space in the same way as the harsh, artificial white glare from the neon. Improvised in time, the sound has an almost ‘boiling over’ nature as it was filled with energy.

The field of neon bears similarities to an expanded field Theremin<sup>11</sup>, with each fragment having the potential to produce sound, and perhaps possessing a unique, characteristic sound.

The fragmentary nature of the scattered neon is laid out in such a way as to no longer make a unified whole, it therefore lacks form to be read as a traditional sign, as if the plan for assembly is missing. In a world where signification and consumption of images takes place in increasingly overabundant and ever more complex ways, the performance works from the ground up, from a partial ruin of illegible and indistinct signs. The onus is placed on the viewer to piece the elements together, to make sense of what is unfolding before their eyes and ears.

The work could reference unlearning or forgetting, going back to a primal pre-language state of being. Where the eye and ear are almost washed clean, disinfected by the intensity of light and volume of sound. A scrubbing of sensory memories and of accumulated language back to a natal state, the performance acting as a kind of sensory salve to an audience. In the context of all the other work in the commentary, it establishes a kind of locus for engaging in the following works. In this piece the bare bones of the practice and collaboration are established, combinations of live performance, light and sound.

This piece was performed at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and performed twice in a shopfront in the Merchant City, Glasgow, as part of the Sonica<sup>12</sup> Festival on 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>. November 2012.

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<sup>11</sup> Theremin: an electronic musical instrument invented by Leon Theremin in 1920.

<sup>12</sup> Sonica is a biennial festival of visual sonic arts held in Glasgow since 2012, <http://sonic-a.co.uk/>

## 5. *Two Ruins*

Queens Park Railway Club (November-December 2012)

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 20 to 30)

In this piece, the intention was to produce new work, moving beyond performance with neon to include other elements within the space, expanding the range of possibilities. The piece that resulted was eponymously called *Two Ruins* and combined a found text by American artist, Chris Burden (1946-2015) with sculptural neon elements that would remain in the space after the performance almost as relics. The piece filled the two small spaces of the gallery. In one room a text by Chris Burden<sup>13</sup> was subtly altered by Jim Colquhoun. Jim's name appeared at the bottom to erase Burden as the author to claim *his* ownership of the text (Appendices, page 53-54). Some of the text was also erased by use of asterisks as if time had worn away some of Burden's intentions and blunted his intended meaning, or as if it had been redacted, giving rise to the idea that the erased word might be confidential. On top of the printed text, three white neon sections were mounted in the shape of the sound forms of sine-wave, triangle-wave and saw-tooth. The neon illuminated the text and paradoxically, also made it difficult to read, causing further potential ruptures in any reading. The neon also referenced the text being spoken aloud, akin to becoming a lived and *live* communication rather than as a document of art history.

In appropriating Burden's statement, Jim removed all punctuation, so the content seems to read like a stream of frantic consciousness, rather than that of a considered reflection or memory. This, to me, re-emphasises the intense psychological nature of Burden's piece. It

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<sup>13</sup> The text was taken from Burden's statement and reflection on his 'Bed Piece' of 1972 and was condensed and subtly altered. For 'Bed Piece', Burden requested a bed to be placed in the gallery space (without communicating his intentions) where he was due to show work and he simply got into bed in the gallery in Market Street, Venice, California from 18<sup>th</sup> February to March 10<sup>th</sup> 1972. He remained in bed for 22 days without any interaction with anybody else or stating how long he might remain, thereby placing responsibility on others for his care and also raised questions about his possible mental state. In a simple act Burden had turned the gallery space, into one of silent, psychological speculation and voyeuristic display by rendering an intimate event (being in bed) into a public event.

may also have given a reader some anxiety in regarding what they might encounter during our performance.

At this show at QPRC, the text was the first work to catch a viewer's eye as it was in the initial space. It acted to frame our work and put it in relation to Burden's practice of extreme performances. Furthermore, in quoting Burden's text, we had appropriated both the isolation of his piece into our own performance (where the audience was disregarded and ignored) and also the time it refers to – the time of the original work in 1972 and also the 22 days duration of his piece. Our work provided a bridge of conceptual time stretching back through 40 years, from Burden in his bed to our performance, with searing white neon and intense sound, on a black, shiny void.

In the main space, a large black flat circle lay on the floor, formed from pieces of black acrylic plastic. This formed a fragmented dais, a kind of stage but also referencing a void, like a black hole. On to this were placed several white neon sections. In front of the doorway into the space, several lengths of blue and white neon hung, forming a tall column, that blocked access to the space, visually obscuring the performance, forcing viewers to peer at us from outside. In the half-darkness before the performance started, a small synthesizer pulsed out a low powerful throb, marking time and filling the space until the performance began. This also heightened tension in the room, creating an expectant atmosphere.

There are contradictory elements to the performance, our bare chests connoted a stereotypical male toughness, but we were not using heavy tools. Rather, we were doing delicate work, using our hands, creating an overwhelming sonic field from neon. As the performance went on and as we moved around, the black disc moved and fragmented and unmade itself; a slow disintegration of a perfect circle. It became a type of anti-clock unmaking itself through the time of the performance.

In this second *Two Ruins* piece, the work had become more complex and by referencing Burden had placed the work within a performance tradition. The work could also be seen as a kind of reverie on time and how artworks become forgotten or retain power over time as they enter history and memory. In our act of liberating sound as a raw sonic energy from neon

whilst the ghost of Chris Burden inhabited the first room, it was as if we were trying to gain some insight or connect to his ideas.

Through the intensity of sound and light produced, we were hoping to lodge impressions in the minds of viewers by inviting them to consider a range of ideas about time, longevity and how meaning and ideas are formed. There was a void at the heart of the work: the highly reflective black disc. It acted like a mirror to reflect the light and our bodies surrounded by sound. It was almost as if we were fighting for relevance, to ensure a memory would be lodged, before we too, were sucked into the past, beyond the event horizon of the black hole on which we performed.

## 6. *Blind Sight*

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 31 to 32)

Plug 3 at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2013.

and

Sound Thought (a conference run by music students from Glasgow University at the CCA) on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

This performance used three sections of neon representing sound waves, sine, triangle and saw-tooth placed on the floor. A video projection of a fire filled the back wall of the stage, together with the sound of it burning. The performance took place in a black box type theatre space. For the duration of the twenty- minute piece, Alison McGillivray and I swapped roles. I sat on a chair to the left of the stage with the baroque gamba, between my legs and a bow in my hand, held in the underhand bow hold, traditional with gamba playing. Alison sat on the floor surrounded by illuminated neon tubing, her face was lit with the harsh white light of the neon, draining her face of colour, heightening a sense of fear she perhaps felt. The video of the fire appearing on screen was our cue to begin our performance. Alison slowly moved, creating sound from the various neon forms using a proximity oscillator.

The piece estranged Alison from her relationship with her instrument. She was rendered vulnerable on stage without it, tasked with taming the raw and unpredictable sounds the neon made. I was also exposed as an untrained musician yet held a beautiful hand-made gamba that I had to make sound with. In merely holding the instrument, the audience perhaps, automatically assumed I was a musician.

Hovering over the performance was the nightmare trope of every performer: forgetting how to play, stage fright and the fear of humiliation. To counter these fears, we each had to concentrate with intense focus in order to form the piece through time. We tentatively attempted to become familiar with our instrument in real time over the course of the twenty-minute performance. We were both vulnerable before the audience as we struggled to develop a performance in real time using the sounds from each of our instruments.

We were both immediately out of our usual comfort zone. I was hampered by having scant, almost non-existent knowledge of gamba playing as both novice performer and non-musician. Alison was forced to try and wrest musical sense from the neon which was like a large scale theremin. We each had to apply our sensibilities through a foreign medium and

create meaning through mutual sound generation, both learning together through the act of doing in real-time. This piece started from a base level of raw, formless sound. The initial sound came from the fire, with random pops and crackles. Using this as a cue, we followed the fire and its growing intensity and arc toward burning out as a guide to lead our playing. There was an inherent flux and intensity to the fire - a great source of energy with a short existence. The neon had a sound of its own, raw, energized and crude, distinctly different and opposed to that of the gamba. Alison adapted her playing technique to the neon, taming and holding the sound, trying to regulate the almost uncontrollable sound that she worked hard to harness and reign in. As she became more familiar and able to 'play' the neon she used her training to discover and subsequently create a musical identity as we slowly began to develop a mutual soundscape together. I gravitated toward droning notes that seemed to fit with Alison's playing. In a live situation, we were trying to find and explore a new space of sound through our joint vulnerability. This was done through technologies separated by hundreds of years.

The title, *Blind Sight*, is ambiguous but can help in locating several themes present in the work. It could refer to musical sight reading i.e. reading a score in real time and playing as the music is read (in this piece there is no score, just the time of the fire burning out and the video coming to an end which marks the end of the performance). It is also a paradox, *blind* and *sight* positioned together yet in opposition: non-vision and vision, a play on opposite states, creating a dissonance.

*Blind Sight* was an intervention as an artwork within a musical context of an evening of electroacoustic performances, with different parameters of meaning away from possibly conservative notions of usual musical improvisation. Meaning did not reside only in the production of an improvised sound, but rather the whole of the performance was there to be read and considered. This and the fact that we had both voluntarily stepped over a temporary threshold to the others identity, was where the key meaning of the piece was located. The potential of our relationship within the context of the performance enabled questions of identity and sound as a material of communication between us both and the audience to be raised. For the CCA iteration of the piece video of fire was re-edited to slice elements out of the film so it appeared to strobe or stutter, looking as if the fire was fragile, could disappear, or could go out at any moment, in order to heighten tension in the performance.



## 7. *The Hyperboreans*

Queens Park Railway Club (February 2014)

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 33 to 43)

*The Hyperboreans*, the second piece developed for Queens Park Railway Club, forms the first part of what could be seen (retrospectively) as a trilogy of separate but interconnected pieces. Each of the three works feature combinations of, text, neon, performance and sound.

The three works broadly address the following themes:

*The Hyperboreans*- The qualities of a natural location, a ritualised quest for hidden truths within appearances of nature.

*The Profane Illuminations*- Time, dreamscapes and history set in a Scottish castle and influenced by the writings of Walter Benjamin and Robert Burton.

*A Voyage to Arcturus*- A Sci-Fi odyssey of inner and outer spaces, using the novel by David Lindsay as a starting point and title.

This exhibition comprised a projected film work, a text written by Jim Colquhoun, a neon sculpture and the title of the show, *The Hyperboreans*, fabricated in green neon. We also performed to the screening of the final film during the exhibition opening using amplified voice, and electronic and acoustic instruments.

The focus for the film was a small neon piece we used to perform with, originating from drawings we spontaneously made. Two resultant neon light drawings emerged spontaneously from our individual unconscious as a burst of energy, integral and unique to each of us. Ultimately using just one neon, mounted on black Perspex for the film, this was so it could be dark as well as light, existing in two states, opposite and contradictory, depending on how it was held.

The film (18:23 seconds in duration) was the main element in the installation at Queens Park Railway Club. In the first room two green neon pieces were installed, a burnt branch from the

fire we made in Rosneath (the film location) was used as a template and remade in green neon and bonded with it, the real and artificial combined with a faint odour of burnt wood. The title of the show was fabricated in green neon and mounted on a wall so as to illuminate a text Jim had written ([Appendices pages 55-56](#)), printed in green on white paper also mounted on an adjacent wall. The purpose of this was to have a glowing green room, alluding to the natural world but in reality, an artificial electrical glow. The text (also green) became hard to read due to the persistent green light in the room and was used as a device to engage the viewer with the work by inviting them to an imaginative reading of the film. The neon bathed the viewer in synthetic colour and had the effect of making the view of the world outside appear imbued with an unnatural hue, rendering it instantly odd and strange. These aspects of the show emphasized the tensions between 'real' and 'artificial'. There are many other binary oppositions and inversions in the film. At points, it literally inverts and folds on itself, Rorschach-like<sup>14</sup>, a blot alluding to potential meaning and unique to the subjectivity of every viewer. The image is at times blurry and then doubles as if referring to a heightened mental state that we may have achieved through the apparent ritual we seem to be involved in.

The film is based in a natural location, with trees and foliage surrounding us, where we seem to be attempting to divine meaning of some kind via touching the neon sign as if it were a holy relic. Sometimes the white neon faces the viewer, at other points in the film it is turned toward our gaze. A dreamy, hallucinatory quality pervades the film as if a vision has been captured on film or as if an inner intoxication is imprinted on the film. Images are layered and blurred against the gloaming, silhouetted trees. Unspeaking and only communicating through our joint actions, holding the neon takes on an apparently ritualistic importance in the film.

We could almost be priests, shamans or shabby holy men. Members of a post-apocalyptic cult trying to accumulate sense or literal enlightenment from a fragment of a previous civilization, trapped in a polluted, smoking environment. As we interact with the neon, our touch appears charged with electricity as it causes the light to move around inside the tube. In

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<sup>14</sup> Rorschach: Rorschach test, a test designed to show intelligence, personality and mental state, in which the subject interprets ink-blots of a standard type. [Herman *Rorschach* (1884-1922), Swiss psychiatrist] The Chambers Dictionary.

doing this we also seem to be transmuting our energies or inner thoughts into visible light; causing the neon tube to glow to illuminate our hands, also reveals our faces. As the film progresses, dusk moves into night, intensifying the artificial light of neon. Smoke drifts and swirls through the location, its source withheld, that it might reference destruction or allude to formless thought. We both look directly into the camera and therefore the viewer, through the held neon, as if this is filtering our gaze or somehow altering the reflected gaze of the viewer in turn. The neon has the vague appearance of an outline of a skull, a reference to a lost presence or lost ideas that both of us are trying to connect to.

For the opening night we did a sound performance. In doing this we were adding a live interpretation to the film playing and also preventing an audience from being in the same space as us. They were observing us from behind, being in the first room so they were bathed in green neon – an artificial nature.

We had a microphone, mixing desk, amplified acoustic guitar (played with a violin bow) and a small analogue synthesiser. For this performance we intended to react spontaneously and organically, in the same way the film had been made in the first place and resisted any kind of structure. The sound shifts from electronic, synthesiser sounds rising and falling in pitch. The higher, expansive sounds seem to have the effect of opening out the space of the film, increasing a perception of space to infinity. They also allude to sci-fi soundtracks, where high-pitched sounds signify a threatening hidden power or force. These sounds could also be said to relate to the electricity used to power neon. There are long, drawn out notes and periods where sounds move only slowly, lending a languorous and meditative aspect for the viewer, holding them in the moment and the action slowly unfolding onscreen.

## 8. *The Profane Illuminations*

Queens Park Railway Club, Glasgow International<sup>15</sup> (G.I.) (April 2014)

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 44 to 52)

The title, *The Profane Illuminations*, comes from an essay written by philosopher Walter Benjamin called, *Hashish in Marseille* (Benjamin 2006). Benjamin ingests hashish in a hotel in Montpellier and his subsequent wanderings around the backstreets of Montpellier allow him to take fascination in details of things he encounters in his intoxicated state. These visions become ‘a Profane Illumination’ as opposed to a religious illumination as he is seeing things in a drugged state and not through religious rapture:

“The notes I made [concerning the first two experiments with hashish] . . . may well turn out to be a very worthwhile supplement to my philosophical observations, with which they are most intimately related, as are to a certain extent even my experiences under the influence of the drug.” As an initiation into what he called “profane illumination,” the drug experiments were part of his lifelong effort to broaden the concept of experience’.  
(Benjamin, 2006, Foreword vii, *Hashish in Marseille*).

As an extension of Benjamin’s idea, Jim and I similarly *dosed* ourselves via various writings to start the process of making a final film work. We read parts of Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Burton, 1621/2004) a work written in 1621, ostensibly about the anguish of the mind and its propensity for misery. The book addresses the vast interests and areas of knowledge that Burton had. It is an open-ended book and resists closure which were qualities we desired for this work.

The film, located in Myres castle<sup>16</sup>, is an attempt to evoke a dream like state by trying to find a *profane illumination* through our encounter with the castle, its contents and history by using an actor (Tam Dean-Burn<sup>17</sup>) in combination with ourselves. Together with neon, we wanted

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<sup>15</sup> Glasgow International, Scotland’s largest contemporary art festival, held in traditional and found spaces, first begun in 2005 and 2006 before adopting biennial format. <https://glasgowinternational.org/about-2018/>

<sup>16</sup> Myres Castle, Auctermuchty, dates from 1530, and its history is closely linked to Falkland Palace, nearby.

<sup>17</sup> Tam Dean Burn, (born in 1958) a Scottish actor who has played a wide range of roles, in film, stage and screen. Most well-known for playing a gangster in BBC Scotland’s River City.

to create a point of entry into this state for a viewer and for ourselves. Perceptions of time and history pervade the film and for me, aspects of introspection, dreaming, longing, melancholy and anticipation all folded together, creating an ambiguous atmosphere, floating in time. The film can be read in an open-ended way and the scenes interpreted in manifold ways, as it lacks a definitive over-arching narrative, other than the ritualistic acts of initiation led by the protagonist, Tam Dean-Burn. A viewer is invited to make sense of the flow of images, or let them enter their imaginations organically, like experiencing a dream.

The use of neon in the film extends that of *The Hyperboreans*, as if it is extending consciousness or has some facility as a tool to unlock visions. In this film, the neon becomes worn by us (as a collar) and becomes interwoven with our inquisitive fingers and therefore a more intimate element of bodily adornment. Wearing it may allude to its control over us in some way; is it controlling our visions? We also appear to (or are coerced to) use other neon objects as a tool, to peel away the outer appearances of things within the castle. Helping to reveal (via its illumination) aspects of the castle and its contents that may otherwise go unnoticed or remain hidden. When a neon coil is held in front of a grandfather clock at points in the film it could be read as *mocking* the flow of time or attempting to slow or, reverse it.

In the final scene Jim and I lie apparently unconscious on a snooker table, in a room that used to be a small chapel within the castle. In the original pulpit above us Tam intones, in the fashion of a preacher or lecturer imparting great wisdom and knowledge, a passage written by Jim Colquhoun but heavily influenced by key texts mentioned earlier (Burton, 1621/2004) with some parts directly referenced, to further weave meanings together (Appendices pages 57-58).

Tam delivers a lecture from the pulpit and this is the only spoken part of the film. He reveals what the viewer has journeyed through, providing keys to unlock themes existing in the film. Placed at the end of the film, this allows the viewer to look back on it afresh, as if journeying back in time, to revisit the formation of their own ideas. The press release (Appendices page 57) gave an invitation to enter the work, a passport to the dream-world, a space to wonder. Tam's lecture bookends the work but not directly; it too needs thought to disentangle complexity.

Tam seems to address directly dreams and worlds of imaginings through the use of arcane language, the potential of visions to be seen as 'real' (in the way we observe film). The cutter's art, alluding to the editing of film and collage and the way it can fool to create a falsehood. It is a deconstruction of the film in a way, revealing its essence. For example at the very end, he also speaks scientifically about the use of optics to reveal the physical aspects of light, suggesting, perhaps, that the film *itself* is a *Profane Illumination* - the effect of light passing through a lens and falling upon a wall, a temporary vision that fades like a dream.

A performance was planned for the opening night, to provide a 'live' aspect, as we were to be in the same space as viewers. This was to also, 'puncture' the reality of the film, by appearing like apparitions in the gallery, thereby conflating the fictive space of the film and the 'real' space of the gallery. For this, we each wore dark glasses, were naked from the waist up and each held a bass guitar upright, like a totem. The guitars were amplified with reverb. The crowd were around us and we very slowly moved among them, physically making them move and part as we came toward them, as if we couldn't see the crowd and we were in some other plane of existence, walking as if the space were empty, like sentinels guarding the film, somehow lost in time and space.

We played very long single notes, each of us barely playing, using notes to fill empty space rather than following musical logic by creating a melody. The dark glasses were worn as a tongue in cheek rock music cliché that hid our eyes, but also signified that we were possibly blind and genuinely could not see the crowd, especially as they had to move out of the way as we came toward them.

The entire film and performance invited an audience to reconsider their perceptions and thoughts; to use the film as a poetic vehicle to journey beyond the prosaic world to an in-between dream world where the registers of objects, spaces and time are subtly altered and shifted; to allow fresh, surprising perceptions to occur.

### 9. *A Voyage to Arcturus*

Ekko<sup>18</sup>, Festival, Lydgalleriet, Bergen, Norway (2014)

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 53 to 61)

The show comprised of a video projection, smoke machine, wall-mounted text with neon and two stacked video monitors, framing the entrance.

The starting point for this work was reading ‘A Voyage to Arcturus’ by David Lindsay (Lindsay, 1965). Lindsay invented new words to accommodate the perception of new colours in the narrative. I found this, resonated with the poetic language used in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Theory of Colour (Goethe, 1840/1970).

‘It was an entirely new colour-not a new shade or combination, but a new primary colour, as vivid as blue, red or yellow, but quite different. When he inquired, she told him that it was known as “ulfire”. Presently he met with a second new colour. This she designated “jale”. The sense impressions caused in Maskull by these two additional primary colours can only be vaguely hinted at by analogy. Just as blue is delicate and mysterious, yellow clear and unsubtle, and red sanguine and passionate, so he felt ulfire to be wild and painful, and jale, dreamlike, feverish and voluptuous’. (Lindsay, 1965, p53).

Set within a sci-fi genre, this is a strange, thoughtful and philosophical book. Lindsay was concerned that the world we perceive may be just a veil over a more fundamental, deeper reality that our sense organs are not equipped with to fully penetrate.

The installation comprised of a black room draped with heavy black out cloth. The film was projected on to a wall at the far end of the gallery. To the left of the looping film was a text that Jim Colquhoun had written entitled *A Voyage to Arcturus*, an account of interstellar travel and an almost hallucinogenic description of travel, to not just another planet but another perceptual realm. It acted as a document to what was happening on screen.

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<sup>18</sup> Ekko, is a Norwegian experimental electronic music and visual arts festival held in Bergen since 2003. <https://bek.no/en/bek-at-ekko-bergen-electronic-music-and-art-festival/>

Using an ambiguous and playful style, hovering between the tongue in cheek and the deliberately hard to understand, it was wilfully confusing, with ideas taken from the book itself to texts on philosophy and building adhesives, also referenced. Over the text were several straight blue neon sections of varying length. This, again, was an act of deletion or redaction, almost censoring the extraordinary, unpalatable or forbidden information. In doing this, the viewer was forced to fill in the gaps of deleted text with their own imagination, making their reading unique to them as they had to bridge any gaps of narrative themselves. The text was also hard to read, as the only light available was from neon and the film projection. The low light level, combined with the neon cutting through parts of the text, and the cable used to power the neon crossing the text also led to multiple possibilities for misreading and misinterpretation on the part of a reader. This also led back to the core themes of the film concerning the nature of reality, what can we take to be true, as the very act of reading the text was fraught with obstacles, providing fragments of sense.

The four text panels with glowing neon attached could almost be read as a constellation of distant stars or galaxy when scanned in the context of the main projection. Another important element was the use of a smoke machine, bringing an aspect of the film into confrontation with the viewer (every 15 minutes it was set to emit smoke for 5 seconds). Smoke held the projected image and also obscured everything in the space temporarily, other bodies became erased by smoke and light. This device (as with the neon) brought the work and ideas physically into play in the actual space of a viewer and not just as a remote projected image. The constant output from the smoke machine led to a general blue hazy atmosphere in the gallery space, creating the feeling of being in a dreamlike state.

Immediately outside of the space were two video monitors, stacked (images 58 & 59) featuring footage of both of us staring out of the screens, wearing a neon, black light collar. This acted as a kind of confrontation (through staring) at the viewer and perhaps as a warning as to what they were about to witness.



The texts and press release (Appendices pages 59 - 64) provide a way into the piece but do not provide substantial answers as there are many interlocking themes. The press release deliberately speaks of perception via Immanuel Kant and the fact that the brain is always attempting to forge sense from the chaos of the world around and that our brains can only render for us, specifically *human* perceptions. We can never have perceptions of the world that are ever NOT human. Our daily perceptions sitting on top of the swirl of unconscious emotions and activities that go on in our brains and bodies that we are unaware of and estranged from, something is always beyond our human grasp.

The film interrogates our bodies as a way to speak about the impenetrability of our individual psyches, without *us* moving, as if dead. We become landscapes and consciousness seems to be attributed to the neon material scanning us. It seems to be this light emitting entity which has an intelligence and agency. In this film, neon seems to have evolved to have agency itself and Jim and I appear to be rendered static, under some investigation by the neon and the tables are turned. We seem to be *performing* a kind of death, withering whilst our bodies are interrogated. Our movement, if any, is infinitely small: a blinking eye, a twitching finger. Similar to the object-oriented ontology of Speculative Realism<sup>19</sup>, we are *objectified* and *inverted*, as if within a nightmare alien-realm where we are being analysed by objects that have sentience, but no knowledge of our *being*, beyond our impression as objects of meat with no awareness of our interior consciousness.

In this world, objects are alive and living bodies are dead, or appear to be.

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<sup>19</sup> Speculative Realism was first used as a term in 2007 to bring together the work of several philosophers who had common aims. Object oriented ontology (OOO) is a branch of this philosophy that works to place all objects on an equal footing, that things or objects can exist apart from how our human minds understand and relate to them.

## 10. *Blind Spot*

Tulca<sup>20</sup> Festival of Visual Art, Galway, Republic of Ireland (5<sup>th</sup> November 2016)

(Images in documentation appendix, pages 62 to 67)

In using this particular car (a Citroen CX first designed in 1974) we were interested in its futuristic identity and also its slippage through time, as an imagined future vehicle with its slippery streamlined shape suggesting a rocket ship from a sci-fi film.

As the car is relatively rare and attracts the attention of many people, we decided to provide a sharp contrast to the speed and time of a contemporary city by drawing our movements out by moving at a glacial pace in opposition to the cars potential for speed. We did this to separate ourselves from onlookers and not be in the same *time* as them or space, by being in the relative isolation of the car which would frame the performance.

I took, the quality of street lighting (sodium, in particular as it is so ubiquitous on city streets, its limited spectrum has the effect of flattening perception of colour at night) and transformed this into a fabricated 'Two Ruins' sign in a similar coloured neon. The sign was placed on the back seat.

To create a soundtrack to accompany the performance, I began experimenting with neon with contact mics to see what kind of sound was present when illuminated. This created a different effect from using proximity oscillators. I heard the sound of energy in the tube and its vibrations picked up by the contact mic. These sounds seemed to dovetail into a broader concept that was slowly forming: of entropy-energy running out over time, our almost non-movement, even relating to the slow formation of rust, electrical disintegration, or of a future becoming a past.

At 7.30pm we drove to the Media School and parked in front of a derelict barn (around the corner) so we would be unseen before our performance start time of 8pm. We stripped off to our waists and covered our torsos in baby oil to make our bodies reflect light and give our skin an odd surface definition through being shiny.

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<sup>20</sup> The Tulca Festival of visual arts is a festival held in differing venues in Galway, RI. It first began in 2002.  
<https://www.tulca.ie/>

We sat in the car and started the engine. As the car's suspension rose, I turned on the headlights. We slowly drove out of our hidden spot and drove in front of the School where a crowd awaited us. I stopped the car, raised the suspension to its highest, put the headlights on full beam, turned on the neon and started the sound piece. We were bathed in a red glow, we stared resolutely ahead, not looking at anyone or acknowledging anything directly but looking out into space. People crowded around us as the sound leaked out of the car (windows wound down). We slowly began to recline, as imperceptibly as possible and slowly reaching as far back as we could go.

On reflection, the sound emanating from the car seemed to be referring to our internal mental processes, the electrical fizzing and whining of synapses and neurons firing – thought made sound. We looked like crash test dummies, almost appearing to sweat, bathed in the hot red glow of the neon on the back seat, but looking like we were made of plastic and inert, lost in thought. We lay back, recumbent for a minute then started to rise again, slowly and with more difficulty as it took a lot of strength to move back up using our stomach muscles. As we reached the normal erect seated position the sound faded out signalling the end of the performance. I started the car and reversed quickly back out of sight. The first performance ended.

We entered the city as strangers and to any viewers of the performance, may have appeared as if we had come from a parallel universe, like visiting aliens. The main intention was straightforward, to sow the seeds of new stories or fresh interpretations of an urban environment as a result of our interventionist performances by confusing registers of time speed by performing in prosaic locations, we'd driven to. This had potential to create new word of mouth narratives, that might grow, become mythical, reinventing an aspect of the city at night, creating something potentially magical and transcendent.

Speed and perceptions of time, ideas activated with barely moving bodies are themes that fill the work. The car itself is out of time and we move so imperceptibly slowly, almost to counter the potential of the car as an object to travel fast in, contrasting the speed of the city. Like Huyghe's *Trajet* this work reframes mundane travel, our bodies deliberately drag time out, causing a viewer to reflect on his or her time.

The sound used within the piece references entropic decay, disintegration and the slow corrosion of the vehicle by rust. The soundtrack emanating from the car during the performance references short wave radio sounds or static, a sound of running down, energy dissipating, a kind of in between space that the performers themselves seem to inhabit – an ambiguous half space. In the staged set of the car these ideas are played out, our frozen, barely moving bodies referencing an idea of stasis, a journey withheld, delayed and missing.

The title, *Blind Spot*, references driving, of having your field of view obscured. In a wider context it underlines what cannot be seen, the formation of stories and myths catalysed by anachronistic objects and performative events that drag time to perpetuate memory.

## 11. Conclusion

Throughout the preceding chapters the writing has addressed how the works are all interlinked and described the detail of each piece as I understand them. Through a combination of media, the ideas are transmitted through the registers of sound, light, time and presence of the body. This has resulted in a portfolio of work that consists of film, neon works and performances that have existed as gallery installations or performances in public spaces.

The title, *Inhabiting Remote Spaces: An Aesthetic of the Inter-human*, links all of the works in a thematic and overarching way. The title references the way the work confronts an audience through using dynamic combinations of sound and light. Attempting to connect to their sensibilities by using these aesthetic registers, to stretch the audience's sense of normality. The notion of remoteness applies to the way time unfolds in the work, as if time is being stretched or thickened as actions are deliberately slow, methodical and drawn out, as well as referring to the physical remoteness of place. Remoteness also refers to the interior subjective space of the performers as well as that of viewers. These elements combine to mark a separation between the audience and the work.

Thinking through physical and cognitive differences I encountered in my work with Artlink led to the use of performance in this body of work. This led to considering the immersive possibilities of an unfolding performance spectacle before an audience and is a key aspect of this entire body of work. This way of working also forced improvisation to the fore as a way to generate work through process and chance and it became integral to the development of much of the practice and opened up possibilities to operate in the moment, working on the cusp of an unfolding event.

This collection of work uses remoteness as a device to highlight the unreachable internal subjective world of the viewer but paradoxically achieves this through directly engaging their senses.

The aesthetic of the work has progressed and developed by using film and site-specific performances. The use of neon throughout the work has become a vivid motif and is a key part in

the aesthetic identity of both the individual pieces and my work as a whole. Neon has visually seductive qualities which offers a threshold of entry for an audience.

Early performances within this submission used this old advertising medium (which also became a key material in much conceptual art from the 1960s) as a way to initially confront an audience by using it as an experimental material to produce sound. This caused an inversion of the usual sensory hierarchy by creating a shift from the visual to the aural and by the sound attempting to obliterate the power of the visual due to the way the resultant sound became an almost physical entity in the work.

I had envisaged that having been drawn in through their senses (of sound and light), a viewer would find themselves dislocated from an immediate train of thought to make sense of the work and almost be given over to the work for the duration of a film or performance due to the immersive and open-ended nature of the work. Much of the work, through use of stretched time appears hallucinatory or dreamlike, offering a space, potentially free of rational thought for the viewer to inhabit.

Within all the work is a play with meaning and significance. There are multiple reference points a viewer has to navigate and may encounter frustration with, as the work remains open ended and resists being reconciled in closed meaning. In regard to this, a viewer may retain a memory of a disjuncture in meaning as they try to make sense of their encounter by continually attempting an interpretation. This unresolved residue may nag away in the mind of a viewer and is also considered as part of the work.

I have deliberately tried to frustrate a linear reading of the work for instance, by using neon to appear to delete exhibited texts (as in *A Voyage to Arcturus*) and those texts also have gaps in a narrative flow that a viewer is invited to fill.

As work developed, individual pieces used multiple elements, with text, sculpture, film and performance co-existing in a gallery space. Work was also progressed through engaging in site specificity or using a found novel or philosophical text as starting points. There has always been a continual engagement with the potential to 'mean' and create significance. Some works have referenced a multitude of ideas and this has given a spectrum of potential meaning through layering. This has been used almost as a device to overburden the viewer with a multitude of

potential entries available through the work, giving access to unresolved meanings as infinite interpretations continually open out. The tropes of the site-specific works which used a baronial castle, the countryside and a forgotten sci-fi novel have been used to further pick apart themes and explore what meaning could be found through these explorations.

The way I appear in the work has been a continual thread, like a form of self-portraiture. I am always present in the work together with my collaborators; performing, never with speech so that emphasis is placed on the action I am engaged in. Performatively, I am present as a 'live' element of the work, in the films my presence is remote and at one remove. This live aspect of work has been key in creating tension within the pieces. Sometimes, performances have taken place in front of films of performances to double our subjectivities and reference our relationship to time. In this way the theme of remoteness is directly referenced as we inhabit space twice; first as a live presence and second as a residue on film as through the performance we appear to be in communion with our remote selves as memory.

Risk and chance are heightened as the performances are improvised live, seldom rehearsed so that performances become somehow charged with expectation through being open-ended and freighted with jeopardy. The presence of failure in pursuing a series of unfolding moments ensues that the work has a risk and openness that would be lost in a rehearsed and therefore potentially safer event.

Collaboration (the 'inter-human') has been key. Ideas have developed and grown with the benefit of other people to work with. This happened by sharing ideas and having a collection of voices together in the production process. It has increased the potential of the work.

The key collaborator in this body of work has been Jim Colquhoun. My collaboration with Jim has allowed us both to combine our ideas to create this body of work. Our past and ongoing experiences we have with Artlink led to us pursuing the possibilities that led to this body of work.

Other collaborators such as Alison McGillivray and Patrick Jameson led me to consider creative approaches afresh, and push my thinking forward as their ideas came to bear on the development of the differing works they were part of. The use of process and chance as a method to produce work meant that I was able to rethink possibilities for practice and that having a starting point for

work was more essential than a pre-resolved idea where tenuousness became a strength rather than a hindrance as ideas unfolded through a working process.

Overall, this PhD submission has allowed me time to reflect on my ongoing practice and understand where the tensions and motivations came from in the production of the work. The process of engaging in practice contextually and being able to think through my experiences through written reflection has been especially useful and allowed me insights into the various aspects of work I am currently involved in and I have attempted through this submission to make sense of my position to a reader.



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### 13. Appendices:

#### Texts used within the exhibitions

Chapter 5. *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club.

This text was written by Jim Colquhoun. It was printed and wall mounted with neon installed on top as an exhibited work:

at first it was very hard, the first two days were very boring very painful  
and I realized I wasn't anywhere near the end and I didn't see how I could  
go on but by the of the middle of the second week I had to go on to  
establish a routine and I began to sort of enjoy it there my days were full  
and very rich and had a peaceful feeling and as \*\*\*\*\* neared ending near  
close I started feeling sad about leaving I started feeling like I wanted to  
stay and I actually considered staying but I knew that If I stayed there that  
I would be forced to leave anyway and that people would have considered  
me crazy I mean I knew that that they were going to end up for me but the  
fact that I was tempted and that I was very seduced into it to me that is the  
strangest part of this piece some of the energy I think of what was going  
on in my head was sort of conveyed to the other people had a strange  
power around me sort of like a bubble or repulsive magnet most people  
wouldn't come close to me in fact most people seemed frightened

The following text, titled 'Bed Piece' written Burden (1972), was appropriated and altered by Jim Colquhoun (above).

Josh young asked me to do a piece for the Market Street program from February 18 to March 10. I told him I would need a single bed in the gallery. At noon on February 18, I took of my clothes and got into bed. I had given no other instructions and did not speak to anyone during the piece. I started to *like* it there. It was really seductive. That's why I considered just staying there, because it was so much nicer than the outside world. I *really* started to like it, and that's when I started thinking that I'd better be pretty sure that when the end of the exhibition came-I got up. About the death thing...I don't think so, no. It's just that the piece was very relaxing. It is very relaxing to do that and all the anxiety and everything, about what is going to happen, goes because there is nothing I can do to change it. And when that happens it is like a tremendous relief. I started liking it there, and seriously considered staying there, but I didn't because I knew I couldn't. People were really getting upset towards the end. Stanley and Elyse Grinstein were afraid I had flipped out. Bob Irwin came in and asked me not to do anything crazy, not to let the whole thing come down on my head. I could feel this whole tension building up outside. There was no outside communication and everyone thought I had gone over the edge. As the end came near I had a sort of nostalgia about it. In the same sense that it was boring in the beginning, but I had no control over it because it *was* inevitable, at the end I had this nostalgia, this deep regret at having to return to normal. But it *was* inevitable, and I couldn't do anything to prolong or shorten it. On a certain day I had to get up and it would be over, and it would be gone.

Chapter 6. *The Hyperboreans*, Queens Park Railway Club.

This text was printed in green ink and wall mounted as part of the exhibition *The Hyperboreans*. It was written by Jim Colquhoun subsequent to our days' filming.

Entropy with pines, water and monumental inaction

I awoke one morning with the usual perplexity of mind which accompanies the return of consciousness, an entropic mood of decay, systems running down to disorder and finally a numbing sameness, as my thoughts, which a deep and apparently dreamless sleep had dissolved, began again to resume crystalline forms, the strange events of the foregoing day presented themselves anew to my wondering consciousness.

“It is a very strange place, but I scarcely know how to convey the impression it made upon me. It will all sound so simple and ordinary.

There is nothing but disordered pines and shaggy moss-covered boulders. The stream running slowly, and more sloooooowly, forms a stagnant pool there of some considerable extent, from which some sickly-looking trees seem to fling themselves backwards, as if unwilling to approach it, a dead willow leans above the pool, tangling its wan skeletal reflection with the green scum that mottles the pond.”

Cracked, broken, shattered the walls threatened to come crashing down. Fragmentation, corrosion, decomposition, disintegration, rock creep debris, mud-flow sliding to avalanche everywhere in evidence. The grey sky seems to swallow up the trees as fractures and faults spill forth rotting

debris. It is a drowned region, heavy with rot and an infinity of surfaces spread in every direction, a chaos of conglomerates attempting to engulf us.

Then, as an eliding light slurs down to mossy wet oblivion and dishevelled figures stumble around like tranquillised Antelope a scurf of detritus invades this lost forest – a rim of plastic, styrofoam, nylon thrown up by ominous tidal surges, deeper in there is only brown green dank, a catastrophe of blown-down pine's, a post-apocalyptic vacancy filled with twittering, cawing and a distant booming rumble. It is bigger on the inside this place, big enough to swallow up these tiny figures and everything they represent. They gather in a glade cum swamp and divest themselves of their clothing, their bits and bobs and unencumbered they move into the interior, pale beacons illuminating the gathering dark.



Chapter 8. *The Profane Illuminations*, Queens Park Railway Club.

The following is the press release to accompany the exhibition:

The Profane Illuminations is a filmic disquisition on the cult of melancholia, an oblique manual on sexual perversion, a paean to drug-fuelled anomie, a para-oneiric non sequitur on the perceived absence of myth and an exploration of the dank pool of mysticism lurking just under the crust of modernity. Hollingsworth & Colquhoun take a non-linear trip through time all the while drifting amongst lush interior landscapes, touching on and merging with notions of Arcadian splendour, an aleatory beclouding of perception, a tumbling ahistorical multiplicity of forms and an exploration of the intertwined territories of consciousness, memory and imagination.

The following text, written by Jim Colquhoun is spoken aloud by Tam Dean Burn at the end of the film:

When I go musing all alone, thinking of divers things foreknown, when I build castles in the air, void of sorrow, void of fear, pleasing myself with phantasms sweet, methinks the time runs very fleet and all the world is melancholy or mad and every member of it, yet at these disjunctive squares, here seen are parts are joined in one by cutters art, methinks I hear, methinks I see, Ghosts, Goblins, Fiends, my fantasy presents a

thousand shifting shapes, headless grumpkins, terrible grim sub  
humeuations odoriferous and vile, gert men all acquiver and lascivious  
damsels all disabele. Perspective glasses and such natural causes make  
men look as if they were dead, or with animal heads, bull horns scorpion's  
tails and such like. Brutish shapes Then rooms full of waxen figurines as  
seem all curlicued with serpents, adders, dark light green, so tis ordinary to  
see strange uncouth sights by catoptrics, who knows not, that if in a dark  
room the light be admitted at one little vent and a paper or glass set upon  
it, the sun then shine will represent on the opposite wall all such objects as  
profanely illuminate this black incongruous void of lights....

Chapter 9. *A Voyage to Arcturus*, Ekko Festival, Bergen, Norway.

The following is the press release to accompany the exhibition:

Steve Hollingsworth and Jim Colquhoun perform regularly as TWO RUINS – a collaborative practice wherein they inhabit a hypothetical space somewhere between sculpture, sound art and performance.

In 1781 in the Critique of Pure Reason the German philosopher Immanuel Kant warned that the human brain, in squeezing the extant world through its feeble sensuous apparatus gives it a verisimilitude that it does not actually possess, in a doomed attempt to forge order from chaos.

Otherwise, “all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves, would disappear.”

Fast forward then to the early 21st century and those objects have come decisively adrift from the death grip of the human psyche, staring back at us from their newly-forged otherness they correspond to a truth that is contingent in our moving towards them as they fly before us, always inexhaustibly themselves, always more than we can imagine.

*A Voyage to Arcturus* is a new installation exploring the affinities between film, installation, language and sound. They intend to explore a shared obsession with early speculative fiction through the prism of ‘*Voyage to Arcturus*’, an inter-dimensional travelogue which speaks of the development of bizarre new senses attendant on journeys to extramundane landscapes produced in 1920 by writer David Lindsay.

"Just as blue is delicate and mysterious, yellow clear and unsubtle, and red sanguine and passionate, so he felt ulfire to be wild and painful [and] jale [to be] dreamlike, feverish, and voluptuous."

For Lydgalleriet and Ekko Festival Two Ruins peer beyond the extant and through the lens of early science fiction in an attempt to move beyond the ontological irredenta of our present spatio-temporal locale and towards somewhen else. As in previous works, the artists use their own bodies as a locus with which to explore the outer reaches of innerness, in this instance, as body becomes landscape becomes planet we escape the confines of our tiny cosmological dust mote and venture out, where no carbon-based life-form has gone before. Two Ruins are Here To Go.

(Press Release, November 2014).

The following text was wall mounted in the gallery space, overlaid with blue neon:

### **A Voyage to Arcturus**

I have no clear memory of the time I spent amongst the stars, all I have is a series of indelibly imprinted 'sense impressions' that I shall endeavour to set before you in as clear a fashion as I know how and with apologies in advance for the inevitable confusions, semantic pratfalls and descriptive aporia that shall inevitably be attendant on such an 'ill-starred' undertaking.

## The Sensual Objects

Klamm and Valabene helped me to exit the snug confines of the moss-lined crystalline vasculum, 'The Proteus', that had transported us to this faraway eldritch place. Each of us, en-cased as we were in our clear polyethylene 'Iggy' suits crackled loudly as we began to make our way across the surface of Arcturus. Our *Panpsyche Meters* were already chattering constantly, indicating the presence of a variety of inexhaustible objects. The tension arising between 'things' and their qualities began to manifest itself as a gliding slash of light hovering above a pale moor illuminating scraggles of androgenic hair and a plethora of pustules along a perpendicular slough of acid mantle and there, amidst the staphylococcus mites, the varieties of pruritic detritus, the acneiform eruptions, the blanchable erythma, the cysts, the fistula, the sarcoids and the lymph some blind thing wormed fitfully beneath these sunless epidermic uplands. Each of us had our accompanying 'eidolon', which in conjunction with the aforementioned P-Meters, would hopefully serve to deflect the deleterious effects of ingrained anthropocentrism, enabling us to grok in fullness the hylozoic nature of non-being. We stumbled through the rubbish-strewn landscape, which was now lit only by the red neon glow of our P-Meters. We held them in front of our bodies to deflect as much as to illuminate the combined onslaught of

## The OOO

... and the vicarious, asymmetrical and buffered inner lives of the various objects before us. Klamm absentmindedly bent to pick up a shard of integument which act brought about his swift 'death'. Luckily his proxy – the eidolon – took the 'hit' instead and since there is no difference that makes a difference immediately flashed back into existence, although with several parts sliding into a nearby intra-otic wilderness of forms. As we traversed this agential realm our sense of ourselves as 'other' began to dissolve leading to a diminution of the hierarchical ontological virus we had come to see as 'us', the P-Meters flashed and chattered warningly, but it was already far too late. I turned just in time to watch in horror as Valbene's existence sloughed away in a welter of phased and viscous hyperobjectivity. His eidolon had just enough time to form a surprised 'O' before it too was hoovered out of the present finitude.

## The Truncated Cones

A long thin 'sun' began yet again to 'slide' redly above us illuminating the exhausted spectres of myself and Klamm as we continued to plough grimly across the undulating moorland. I could see that we were about to encounter a 'Brötzmann Nipple' for the first time. It loomed on the horizon, a pinky grey mass surrounded by an accompanying androgenic plantation that began to writhe and dance as we cautiously approached. It seemed to be formed of a series of truncated cones surmounted by

variegated slabs of indeterminate origin that somehow resembled a table or tables. A thin crust of tessellated sandstone biers arraigned themselves around this structure, with scalloped facings seemingly sliding upward and here and there bulbous tulip-like ‘cannon’ reaching towards the heavens. From these, a froth of yellowish gel gouted feebly into the air only to slither impotently upon a pale battlement. The Brötzmann Nipple continued to evade the rational workings of our psyches as we edged around its effulgent anomalousness and its amazing grabbing strength not only removes the need to pin under the workpiece to prevent slumping, but its revolutionary initial 'Direct Bond' eliminates the need for double stick methods, but can be used inside and outside and adheres to just about every building substrate. By this time neither of us would be able to look upon architectural forms with equanimity ever again and with a shudder we moved beyond its terrible *thereness*.

### A Black Flag Unfurling

Eternal ennui rushes in from every horizon and Arcturus, it seems, is a dungeon, damp and small where hope flies like a bat before dashing its brains out on a nearby rock. An extruded polystyrene ridge loomed before us, its degenerate edges expelling a billow of stark white toxicity. As a thermoplastic polymer, polystyrene is in a solid (glassy) state at room temperature but flows if heated above about 100 °C, its glass transition temperature. It becomes rigid again when cooled and when the rain

stretching out its endless train, imitates the bars of a vast prison and a silent horde of loathsome spiders comes to spin their webs in the depths of our brains, our Iggy suits protected us from inhaling the long chain hydrocarbons to long-term deleterious effect.

Klamm's hands were coming seriously adrift now, they wandered autonomously around his face and body as if gently probing for an opening to insert themselves within and sure enough they began to thrust themselves forcefully into his abdomen and only the suit was protecting him from being pierced through and then disemboweled – by himself. Finding no entry they swarmed towards his faceplate and began to smash incessantly against the polycarbonate – and without drums or music, long hearses pass by slowly in my soul and Klamm's terrified eyes pleaded with me to take action so I took his prehensile multi-fingered extremities in mine and, with a stubborn, whimpering cry planted a black flag in the depths of his narrow shaven skull.



Professor Gordon Dutton Transcription (12.3.2013)

A conversation with:

Professor Gordon Dutton, Consultant Cerebral Vision Specialist

Alison Stirling, Programme Director, Artlink, Edinburgh.

John O'Connell, Day Care Service Officer.

Wendy Jacob, Artist from MIT, USA.

The conversation started with Gordon talking about the remarkable Daniel Kish, who is blind and uses a technique of 'clicking' his tongue to send out sound waves which bounce off objects which he can 'read' with his visual brain, this is a form of echo-location using low frequency sound. He has literally rewired his brain to interpret sound as visual information. We went on to show Gordon a video of Mark (a PMLD individual) using a device I had made for him. It became a fascinating discussion of how we and PMLD people perceive the world and the difficulties they face due to a lack of understanding their unique perceptions.

*Gordon Dutton*

*What's fascinating is I introduced him to Mel Goodale, in London, Ontario, the biggest and best laboratory team in the world who study vision. I went for a walk with him from here in (Milngavie), he stayed the night here and we went for a walk along the west highland way and he led the way, ok, and he found his way for a two-mile circle, he could see. And he got to the car and he could see the car and everything. What has been studied is, when they study him they have now found that (it's complicated) they put him in an anechoic chamber with no echoes, sat him in the middle of the room, with just a little post-click- 'it's there' etc. and he was accurate within 3 degrees.*

Steve

So, can he construct images in his head in the same way that we can?

GD

*The answer is absolutely yes, and it's been proven beyond all reasonable doubt and that is the case*

Steve

It would be fascinating to know what his subjective experience in terms, as to the type of images he can see.

GD:

*He'll tell you, he can see stuff.*

Steve

He could draw? (reality)

GD

*They recorded him doing his echoes, of rough surfaces, smooth surfaces, surfaces to the right and the left. And then they put him in the biggest and best research scanner in the world in Maastricht, they took him to Maastricht and they played those recordings, they put the microphones to record his own clicks and his own echoes in his own ears. So when he was outside- 'click' the trees over there. What they did, they recorded his sound and his echoes, then they put him into the scanner and they played him the sounds with the echoes and the sound without the echoes, what did the brain do to the echoes only? And the answer is it was completely served in his visual brain, in exactly the same way as your visual brain and it was completely served where shapes like that were highlighting a shape like that, movement was being highlighted in the visual movement part of the brain. So his complete image formation, dolphin image formation is identical to yours and mine, the only difference being his input is sound but it goes to identical parts of the brain. He therefore sees the world as you or I do through sound.*

Steve/others fascinating

Steve

How old is he?

GD

*He's 43, he's been doing it since he was 2*

Steve

As he gets older, will hearing depletion have an effect on his vision?

GD

*Possibly but he can modulate any sounds he makes and echoes he gets. He is extracting very low sound echoes and when he was sat in the conservatory here my daughter came into the room a few years ago and I said 'Daniel' just for my daughters sake what shape is this room 'Sure' 'click' I'm sitting in your conservatory, its an unusual shape but the corners are there, there and there.*

Wendy

Was he born with vision?

GD

*No, he's never had vision, but the reason I'm doing this with you, is actually, that vision, is a philosophical construct within the mind, it isn't out there.*

Steve

Idealism?

*GD because, what your construct is, its divided into two components within the recognition system but it's also divided into the bit that, allows you to move through 3-dimensional visual space and how do you do that? Well, the answer is: moment to moment you capture a 3 dimensional image of space out in front of you and you file it for approximately 2 seconds and then you throw it away ready to capture the next one, the 2 seconds being the time that if you were as horse it would take you to lift your rear leg over the thing you've just walked over, if you see what I mean, because it's the same DNA, it's the same construct, so what we've got in here is a 3 dimensional, unconscious, transient, detailed, emulation of the world outside through which we move. We move through our emulation in our heads. We don't move through the world outside.*

Steve

It's virtual

DG

*It's virtual, yes, so we are living in virtual reality 3D headsets, which are voxelated, voxels being 3dimensional pixels. So, we voxelate the world outside. We move through our own internal voxels, assuming them to be equal to reality, with big voxels to the side and smaller voxels to the middle.*

John

So, is that just so we can negotiate something that makes sense? So that I can function in the same world as you?

GD

*What we've got is two systems, the, automatic system that allows us to move through space, that we do not consciously see, linked to an analysis system so we can see what things are, But this system has to be the system that is also responsible for being able to avoid entities. That's an entity right? (points to an object), and therefore the man you are talking about has got bilateral postero-durietal disturbance, as all quadroplegics do. He therefore sees fewer*

*entities and will perform optimally, probably in an environment that is un-patterned except for the entity he is paying attention to.*

Alison

Is that why you asked what is behind him at the time?

GD

*Yes, because he won't look at your face if its patterned, but he might look at your face if its plain, because then you can be found, So the number of red things (stripes) on the piano for example may be too many to be able to see them as separate entities, possibly.*

Alison

It didn't even work

John

He didn't show a preference, marked or unmarked

GD

*No perhaps not, but what I wonder. I have an idea. What I'd love to pursue with yourselves because I feel very strongly that all children are being forced by Victorian training in music to become little adults instantly and not to play. They have to look at dots on a stave, interpret that into letters then reinterpret that into playing. Well the delay time in that (processing time) is 500 milliseconds. By the time it's gone into their brain. Then interpolated, then changed to a letter, and then put out again (as an action on an instrument) your already half a second behind yourself. So, you can never play to time until you've actually got it into your head. That's a stupid system for teaching music, really fundamentally stupid and especially if your disabled you can't possibly do it because you're supposed to be working to time. How on earth can you possibly do that?' read, interpolate, letter, move,*

*hit/press. My 8 year old son can't do it at all. I mean it's impossible for him, that why they all give up. Whereas colour is instant, colour is immediate, 'ping' it doesn't need to be interpolated, its just colour. Because the latency time for that is 100 milliseconds in its perception not 400 milliseconds.*

Steve

Is colour an effect of the mind? Or is it out there? (in the world)

GD

*It's an effect of the mind, colour is defined as that part of the electro-magnetic spectrum for which man has been endowed perception.*

Alison

Are there some colours, like primary colours that work better for people with brain damage than others?

GD

*Probably its largely primary colours, because no one has successfully studied colour perception in those with brain damage because of course colour perception requires you to have a high level of intellect to be able to manifest your capacity to perceive it and therefore there is a block to being able to determine (colour) having said that it is generally agreed world-wide that for those with brain damage, the most effective means of optimizing their perceptions is through colour. So, you can get a best result by utilizing colour.*

Alison

People do select colour

GD

*That may well be to do with a greater degree of subjectivity than objectivity, it might be their own personal preference range. What I wonder about the piano you see, if one was to for example, to say that low notes is cold, blue notes and high is hot and red and the top notes, and you chose the blue red spectrum and actually have a blue red spectrum with very good segmentation for every single note all the way across and super impose that with sticky labels on the piano and also on the staves, so that each note was identical in colour (still use staves as children will evolve into using it) that colour is that note there, so you wouldn't have to interpolate through a letter and a height on a staff and a position, you would immediately no that that colour is that note etc.*

Steve

I do know someone that uses colour with school kids to get them to play orchestral pieces (that have no previous knowledge of reading music)

GD

*Yes but I think if it was spectral colour and it was segmented in a way that everybody would see it, for disabled people in particular, then it would have to become like qwerty-an international code, once you've got it, you can't relinquish it, so it needs to be the same for everybody to get it right first time*

John

I know that Drake music and Nordoff Robins and maybe other music therapists as well do that but there isn't a uniform system.

GD

*Exactly, precisely, and then of course that breaks down as soon as you try to use it for others and so you can't use orchestras, so it seems logical to get such a team together, to say well, what is going to be the international standard. And, of course for those with Synaesthesia, they see colour anyway with music, but that's a different entity all together.*

GD

*Now the next thing to do with him (Mark) what he has got, his body is dissociated from the task. Can I tell you about a video I saw in Belgium? I was giving a lecture in Belgium to a hundred teachers and they were showing me videos I'd never seen before in public. They showed a boy doing that (Gordon demonstrating) and then they showed him doing this, perfect, perfect, perfect. What was the difference? His knee was touching the table! You see visual guidance of movement is brought about by the postierporietal territory (of the brain) This young man has profound impairment of visual guidance of movement. He is moving through a de-voxelated world. Because his VOXELS are big (3D pixels) Because he's got less tissue here. So what does he need? Tactile consolidation.*

Steve

Pro-priorception is where you can understand where your hands or limbs are in space? Is that a different thing?

GD

*Proprioception is an internal knowledge base of where your body is in space. Because of course this is an integral element of moving through the internal, visualised voxelated world. Because it's a feedback loop, because in order to move through the image in your mind (assuming it to be conincident with reality) you have to move through the voxelated picture in your head and to do that you need proprioception and agnostic knowledge framework of where your arm is in your own preset moment to moment internal visual virtual reality system, so it's part of the virtual reality system. It's the motor element of the internal 3-dimensional map.*

Alison

So, with him?

GD



*Well I don't know for certain, but what I'm guessing is, when your sitting in a wheel-chair, ok? You are framed within the chair, all you've got is vision out there, your doing this, and doing this, and you've got quadriplegia, you therefore probably have Balints syndrome, which is-an inability to use vision to guide movement, or disability to use vision, to guide movement associated with a disability to see more than about 5 or 10 entities at once. So, the more entities you have, the more there is to see, the less able you become. I have a colleague who is dealing with these people as children and she has come up with the idea of a tent, a bell tent suspended from the ceiling and you bring down from the ceiling this tent and go inside it with them and all of a sudden, people like this 'wake up'.*

Steve

Why? (do they wake up)

GD

*Because you have removed all the visual distraction and presented a singularity of colour, so that now, the person that you're with, for example, or the object that, their, with suddenly becomes apparent. If you can only perceive two things at once and you are in clutter you see nothing, you are rendered blind (it's very good for autistic spectrum disorder as well) I understand you visited Temple Grandin or met her (to Wendy) well, she goes into her fur lined box of a night as I've read from Oliver Sachs' book (An Anthropologist On Mars) There's a difference in her type of high level autism, the reason why it is difficult to handle a multiplicity of entities is that they are all stimulating the mind at the same time because the active process of elimination of those elements you do not at present want to give attention to is missing, so your constantly feeling your bra/pants and everything simultaneously and that's overwhelming! on the flip side of that, if you've got damage to that part of your brain, then you can only see one thing at a time and not see the rest and so there still overwhelming because you can only process one of them, in a sense it's a bit like left wing and right wing come back together again to the same place, because both are helped by being in a stimulus free environment, the first because if you have autism and you are one of these types of autism where you are over-stimulated, then, phew! that's why you might want to focus on one thing only, now you've only got one thing to see, and that's alright, because everything else is*

*eliminated by proximity, as soon as you do that, woosh! Everything hits you and you can't cope with it anymore.*

Wendy

And your hands maybe the nearest thing to do that with?

GD

*Yes exactly, and you can bring it... you are controlling. Whereas if you are put into a blank white room and there is one singular thing of interest, you can go over to that thing and pick it up and play with it, because no longer are you being assailed by so much going on, but by contrast, in this young man (mark) who has quadriplegia and impaired visual guidance of movement that is always accompanied by simultaenagnosia, which is the long word for saying you can only see one thing at once or three things at once.*

Steve

He can walk actually, he's in a chair because he can reach out (and grab things)

GD

*But the question is, if he's wanting to achieve something, then he needs to have through motion, there needs to be a plain background as well as bodily contact with the area he needs visual guidance of movement, to supplement tactile guidance, and proprioceptive gnosis, where I am in relation to this thing out here, its no longer a floating entity where I've no idea where it is in space, now I've got a little more information, its linked to my body in 3D space, so now I can go bang! And put the thing in. In order for him to be successful at that task, his body needs to touch the framework of the thing he's putting the peg in.*

Wendy

It's so subtle

DG

*It appears subtle, but its fundamental.*

Steve

Here's a video of Mark playing piano, there are two switches on the piano, they vibrate when touched and reinforces cause and effect

DG

*I think what you do is brilliant, see! He's using his thumbs to provide tactile guidance, he doesn't know where the piano is in 3D space, so he has to go-there it is! He can't do that because he'll miss the piano. If you were to allow his knees to touch the piano, then he could use his thumbs to play the keys. I'm guessing, these are all hypotheses.*

Steve

He's running his thumbs up and down the piano

DG

*He's using supplementary tactile guidance to provide him with the framework of the 3-dimensional image of where his hands are in 3-dimensional space, because he can't use visual guidance only.*

Alison

So, for him then, to touch the buttons...

DG

*Yes, that's difficult, because he doesn't know where it is in space, If, however there was a lead in... You see when you are training babies, little children with Balints syndrome, right?*

*And you want them to reach that computer, then what you do is this...and you're the baby, provide a tactile ramp!*

Alison

So, for him to reach the button?

DG

*Where the bloody hell is it? I've only got voxels this bloody size! How the hell can they expect me to hit it, that's how I would be feeling, I mean I'm normal! Ah, yes, (looking at video) if that were a metal rod coming down, he'd be instantly there.*

Steve

He's attracted to long floppy lines, do you think that's why?

DG

*Your asking him to do that, if that...ah, he got it that time, so he is getting it, but its hovering in space.*

DG

*People do not understand impaired visual guidance of movement, which is called oxiatxia, it's not in the medical literature, doctors just don't understand it at all, and neither do physio- therapists or occupational therapists, it's not in their literature.*

Steve

We think we look at everything, but obviously we don't know....

DG

*My concept framework is that everybody like ourselves who are working with people like this need to be seeing the world as THEY are.*

Steve

That's what we try to do, but it's impossible....

DG

*Well, I can show you soon what it's like with visual acuity because we actually made that software and I can show you precisely what pictures are like in 3D space.*

Steve

Marks mum said she's like him to be able to put a square shape in the correct hole, but is difficult for him to do

DG

*The other thing with that is to, there are two elements on that in terms of shape analysis, what you've got there are coloured, but the tray doesn't have reciprocal colour, if the tray did have reciprocal colour...there is available on the market..It's on the LEA website What it is..4 shapes that you might want to buy actually, it's about colour cross referencing, and you can tell which people use colour as their guide to compensate for their lack of object agnosia, inability to recognise the shape of the object, thereby to put it in its correct location, and so the question is-does this young man have..he's either got object ataxia as evidenced by his behaviour of doing this and using his thumbs or he's got inability to recognise shapes which will be shape agnosia, which will be damage down here (pointing to his head) or he can't put the shape into the tray, not because he can't recognise the shape, but because he can't actually put it into the tray. Now, in terms of the type of brain damage that occurs, unless he had hydrocephalus as a baby (and he hasn't got a big head) then its more likely to retain shape analysis, then his problem in being able to do it will be motor as opposed to shape recognition deficit.*

*In terms of getting him to be able to put the shape in he needs to use supplementary tactile guidance, to guide him to putting it in the right place*

Alison

Would he learn then, if the tactile surface led him, like an iron bar towards the shapes, he would then learn

GD

*That's the point can he through progressively removing the tactile bar ultimately decrease the size of his voxels? Nobody knows. But once you have learned by using a tactile methodology, is it possible by becoming competently skilled at it to ultimately do it without the bar? Having gone through a process..*

Steve

He'll be making new connections (in his brain)

*GD exactly! Yes, precisely. Which is why I told you about Daniel (Kish) he's completely rewired his brain, because those echos do not go to his auditory brain, they only go to his visual brain, he completely rewired! Including the 14 year old, when he went totally blind and was trained by Daniel and he too has the signals going to his visual cortex.*

John

There's nothing you can't do!

GD

*Well, the limit is total brain volume and total brain capacity but the potential avenues you have to explore are phenomenal in terms of...but...you mentioned therapy and your not therapists, good!! Therapy is done TO people, it doesn't work. For all of neuroplastic growth and development of the brain, it has to be a motivational force, that the person feels motivated to strive until eventually they achieve it, and it is through that motivation and*

*striving, that neuroplastic change takes place, it doesn't take place by actually doing it to someone!*

Alison

You can do that in the tiniest of ways and build that up..

GD

*Of course, it's the striving that leads to the attainment When they did physiotherapy for children with cerebral palsy and did this (showing a movement) it did nothing, which is no different to taking a taxi to get through Glasgow and the trying to find your way back on foot, you have to drive yourself, unless you drive yourself you will never be able to route find and that's why satnavs are crap! Because everyone will get lost!*

Steve

Yes, they are making us stupid.

GD

*Satnavs are a really stupid thing to use, if you want to be able to find your way about in the future, I would NEVER use one, I have to strive! To learn my way around otherwise your completely dependent on a machine. And that's happening world-wide.*

Alison

You'd imagine that would happen with computers even in research because there are all sorts of different ways to research and if you use a computer to work things out it saps your ability to be creative.

‘Experiencing the Senses in Slow Time at Cherry Road Learning Centre’

Published by *Revista Mesa, Brazil No.5 ‘Care as Method’*, 2019.

Steve Hollingsworth

Art is about transformative experiences; having the world reflected back at us through aesthetic and emotional registers. Allowing us to consider our place in the world afresh. In this context art isn’t about placing static objects in white cubes to ruminate over. It’s about creating aesthetic experiences through time, generating new memories which ripple out in subtle and powerful ways. It uncovers new narratives created by people who are considered of no worth, too disabled. Learning about ways of being from people with severe and complex learning disabilities could be considered a form of reverse pedagogy. It is counter-intuitive, unleashing creativity that is LIVE and exists on mutual levels. Some call it ***Relational art*** but in actuality, away from academic labels, creativity here is about creating catalysts for positive change, on many levels.

For many people with complex developmental disabilities, events happen far too rapidly to be perceivable, the world and events move way too fast for them to catch. To try and decipher minds and memories time has to be ‘thickened’, made ‘sticky’ or ‘congealed’ somehow, to be slow enough to appreciate. We need to meet very much on the same level, unlearning our own rapid perceptions, trying to disengage our own sensory habits - our own ‘normals’. Learning to meet someone with complex disabilities in THEIR time. Building meaningful connections with them, opens interesting doors into new ways of thinking about who we are.

This resonates with the work of British artist John Latham (1921-2006) and the artist placement group (APG)<sup>21</sup>. Latham firmly believed that art could be a vehicle for social change. *‘In Latham’s view, the prerequisite for socio-political change is an improvement in communication between individual disciplines and wider contexts’*<sup>22</sup>

In his Time Base theory, Latham took issue with the traditional mode of Physics where emphasis is directed toward ever more complex understanding of sub-atomic particles. He

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/artist-placement-group>

<sup>18</sup> Ina Conzen-Meairs, *Art after Physics, John Latham’s search for a representation of the encompassing present* (edition Hansjorg Mayer) p.30 ISBN 0 905836 75 8 Published by Museum of Modern Art Oxford 1991.

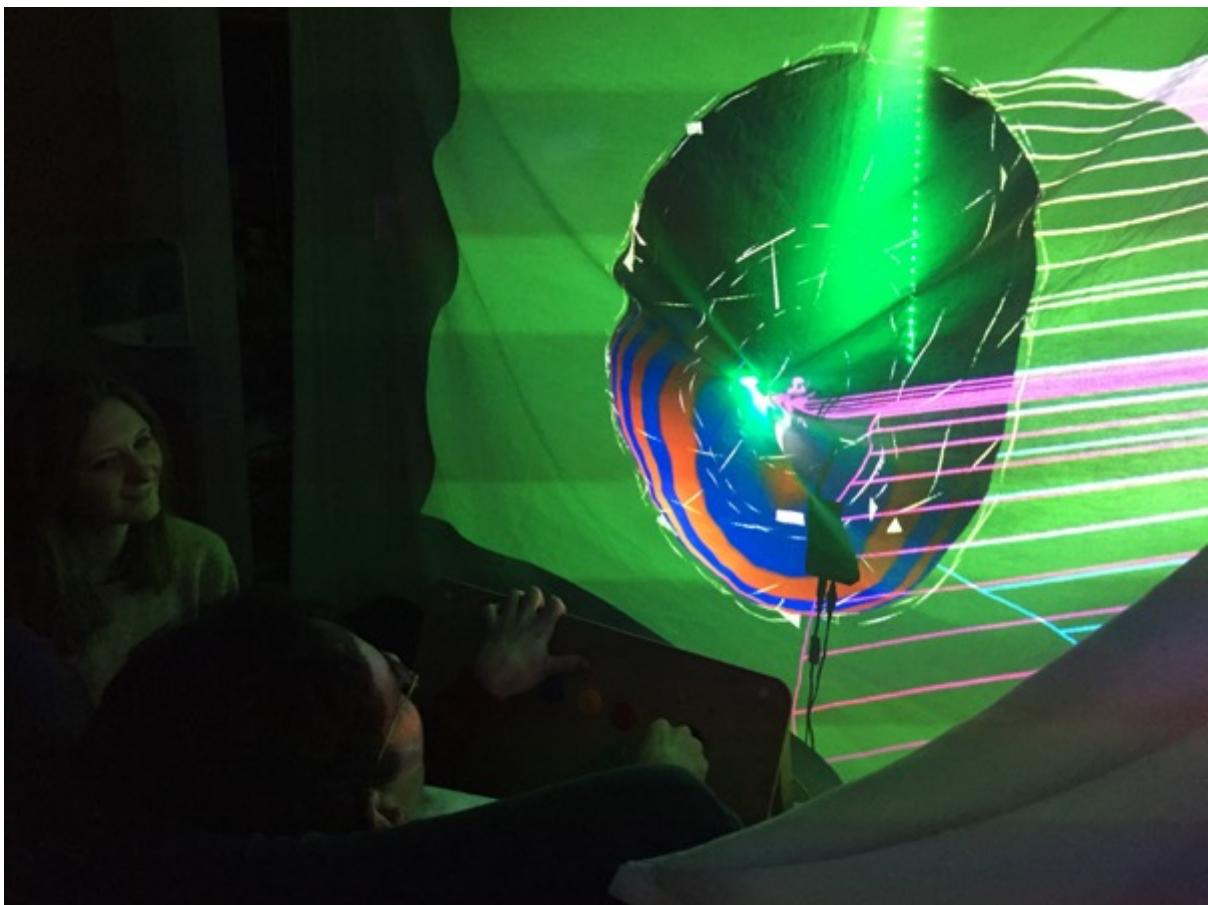


stated that as creatures of memory, our awareness of time as an ‘Event’ should be our fundamental unit of understanding the world.

Latham argued, from a humanistic viewpoint, that an *Event Structure* or *Least event*, could help us explain the world. A *Least event* for Latham was the shortest bridge from nothingness to a perceivable memory, an anti-physics fundamental unit of being.

This parallels with Ben in that in creating new experiences (or units of memory) we punctuate his existence with meaning *for him* beyond institutional care structures.

Ben has complex physical and developmental disabilities. Given the level of Bens disabilities it is best to describe him *as having substantial barriers to learning and participation in community life, which arise from an interaction between organic impairments and an often unresponsive and unsupportive environment.*<sup>23</sup>



Ben

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<sup>23</sup> British Journal of Learning Disabilities (BILD) p33

I met Ben in Cherry Road Learning Centre<sup>24</sup> in Bonnyrigg. He seemed to be on the fringe of things, passive, his potential untapped. Week on week, for an hour or so at a time, Ben took me on a journey. As an artist I absorbed his world. This began with the idea that I could somehow enable Ben to have choice, provide him with agency, empower him with greater abilities to do or not do. I had a few basic facts about Ben - he could see, he could hear and enjoyed high pitched sounds. I was Bens pupil and I would learn by creating aesthetic experiences for him. I combined sounds and light to see how he reacted using a video projector and amplifier. I made sounds using my voice, echoing him. I also focused on what Ben could actually do rather than what he couldn't, trying to find ways to empower him. I noticed he could use his right hand, it lifted when he was excited or laughing. We yelled and made noises together and each time I noted when he laughed at something or reacted strongly or subtly. Together with his care staff we would try and work out why.

Process was key to learning: not knowing where we'd end up; working intuitively, ethically, playfully, sensitively and creatively; looking at tiny details of reactions and what might have caused them. Trying to be as imaginative as possible without imposing my own narrative on Ben. Being sensitive and receptive to Bens reality at all times.

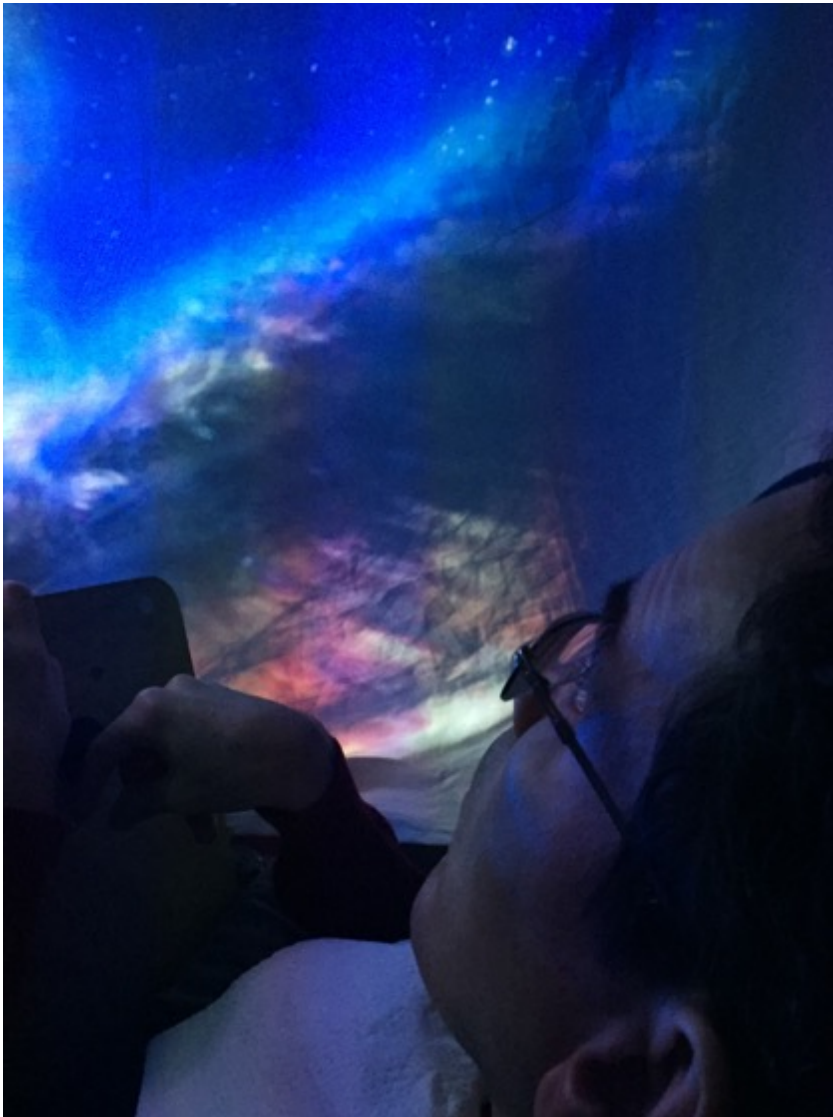
Art here lies in the joy of a conceptual journey, entering new sensory realms that propel him beyond the physical confines of his wheelchair and introduce him to new perceptions. To this end I started working with Lauren Hayes, a PhD researcher in the music department in Edinburgh University with an interest in haptics<sup>25</sup>. Lauren wrote some software that could manipulate still images and sound-slow sounds down, speed them up and also increase and decrease the scale of images and turn them around. It also changed the colour through varying speeds on an LED strip. This all added up to an immersive sensory experience for Ben, controlled via a joy-stick. I downloaded images from the Hubble space telescope and the sounds of planets magnetic fields turned into audible frequencies. Allowing Ben to journey to the stars. Ben probably has no understanding of outer-space but the other worldly colours and sounds provide a huge sensory load that Ben can manipulate and enjoy. Once Ben was laughing so much during a session he pressed down on his footplate with such

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<sup>24</sup> Cherry Learning Centre offers tailored and personalised experiences supporting adults with learning disabilities and adults with autism. Formerly based on a more traditional model of care, the service recast itself in collaboration with leading arts and disabilities organisation, Artlink. This enabled the service to develop imaginative and enriching experiences for people and has significantly improved how the service supports people with very complex needs, leading to sustained positive change and contributing to reduced use of health and care services

<sup>25</sup> Haptic or kinesthetic communication recreates the sense of touch by applying forces, vibrations, or motions to the user.

pressure of joy and broke his wheelchair. This isn't a remote experience for Ben in the way of a video game, it involves all of us, Ben, and the people who care for him playing together.



When I showed Ben's mother Brenda, footage of Ben using the sensorium she was astonished, she thought her son was no longer able to learn. The fact that Ben could engage, motivate and control his own stimulation in activity was unimaginable to her.

In the way of narrative identity defined by French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur<sup>26</sup>, Ben has rewritten his personal life story and has laid a new path for me and others to follow.

---

<sup>26</sup><http://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/>



Inhabiting Remote Spaces:  
An Aesthetic of the Inter-Human

Steve Hollingsworth

**Documentation Appendix**



Royal Conservatoire  
*of* Scotland



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews

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### Contextual Background



Image 1: Improvised performance, Artlink workshop with Jim Colquhoun (2019)



Image 2: Jim Colquhoun performing for a participant during Artlink workshop (2019)



Image 3: Jim Colquhoun performing for a participant during Artlink workshop (2019)

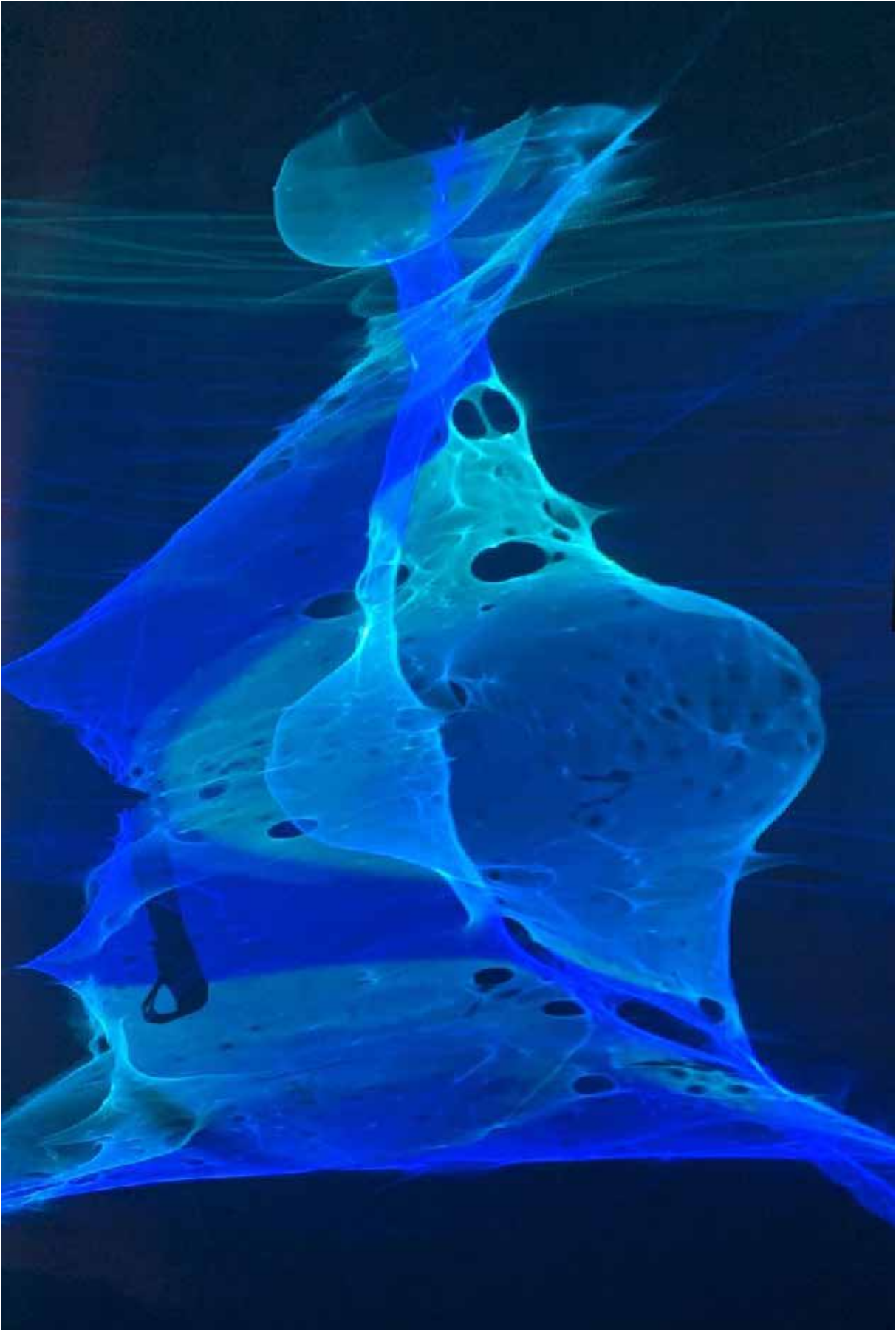


Image 4: Light projection during Artlink workshop (2019)



Image 5: Pierre Huyghe, Trajet, Paris (1992)



Chapter 4.

*Two Ruins* at CCA, Glasgow and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2011)



Image 6: *This is not a reflection III* for Nomi's Kitchen (2010)

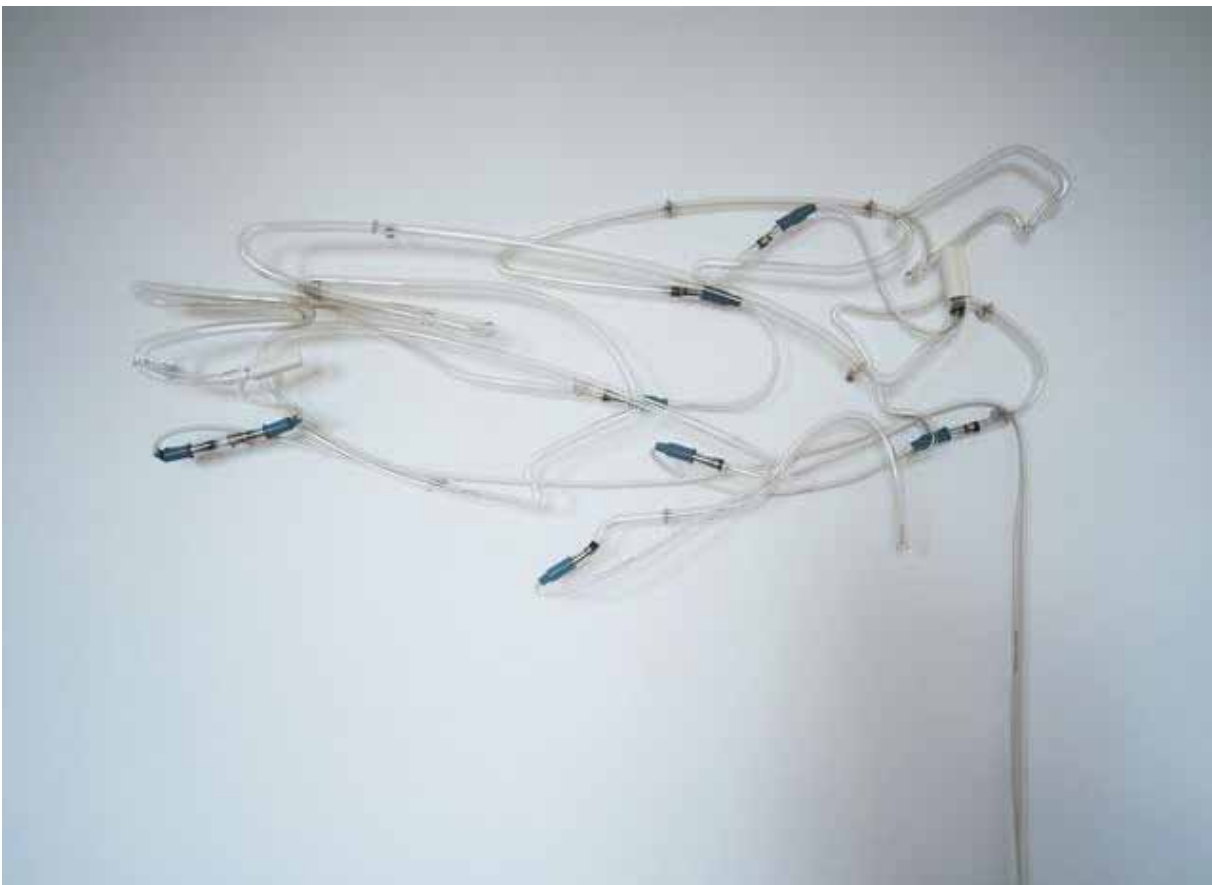
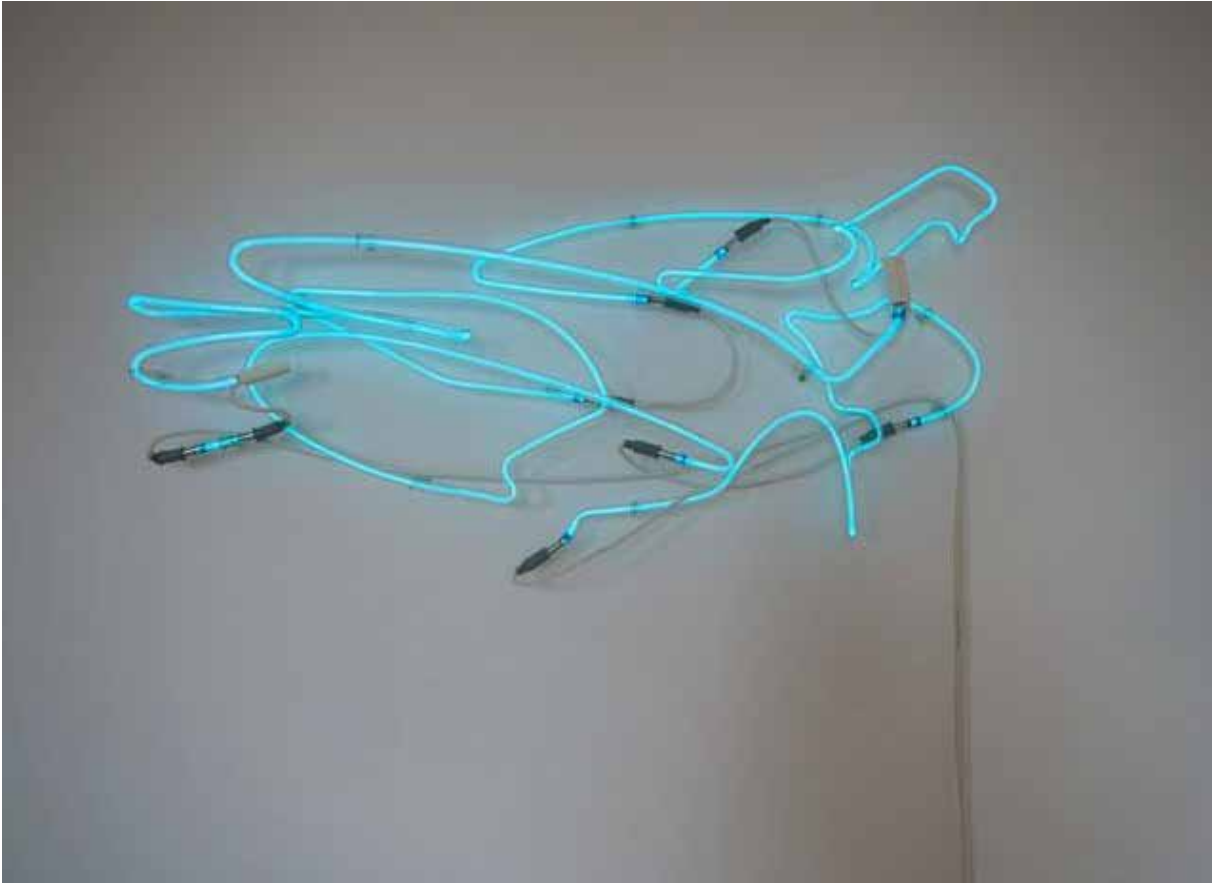


Image 7 & 8: *This is not a reflection III* for Nomi's Kitchen (2010)

## *Two Ruins* at CCA (2011)

This was the first performance of *Two Ruins*, which took place in the Creative Lab of CCA, Glasgow. The piece started at 7.30pm on the 23rd November 2011. It was pitch black outside and raining which added to the atmosphere. At 7.15pm we were in place, crouching among the neon (timed to switch on at 7.30pm) to ensure that we were seen to be integral to the piece, rather than walk on at the allotted time.

A small crowd had gathered round us and as the timer switch clicked to *on*, the neon illuminated instantly, the performance then began. Immediately the space was filled with a stark white synthetic light simultaneously as a roaring sound, running to a high-pitched squeal, loudly filled the room. I was extremely apprehensive before the performance began (this scenario being completely outside my usual experience) as we very slowly and gingerly moved over the neon. Almost immediately I lost my awareness of the crowd and was completely absorbed with eliciting sound from the neon. As my chest moved centimetres away from a glowing tube the tone I was producing shot up, I could control the volume and also the pitch. Jim and I (although aware of each other in space) were mutually working to turn light into sound. We kept very low and crawled over the terrain of artificial light, always conscious not to acknowledge the audience. Utterly absorbed by our task, we were not really aware of time passing, bright light filled our eyes, being in such close proximity to the floor. The sound was coarse and raw. We were attached to the proximity oscillators and they were connected to the PA system by a long trailing black wire, as a consequence we were also tethered by this. The rising and falling of raucous tones filled the space with a loud intensity. We were both given over to our task with a deep concentration. Our awareness of the audience disappeared and after a while it became almost routine to be engaged in this odd labour. Moving, sometimes remaining still, concentrating on a specific area of neon as the sound found there compelled me to stay. Jim similarly found a rhythm akin to mine, our movements and pace within the same limits as we were working to the same ends. As the timer-switch clicked to *off*, the power was cut to the PA and blackness and silence fell upon the space, bringing the performance to an end, we remained absolutely still until the audience left.



Image 9: *Two Ruins* at CCA (2011)



Image 10: *Two Ruins* at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2011)

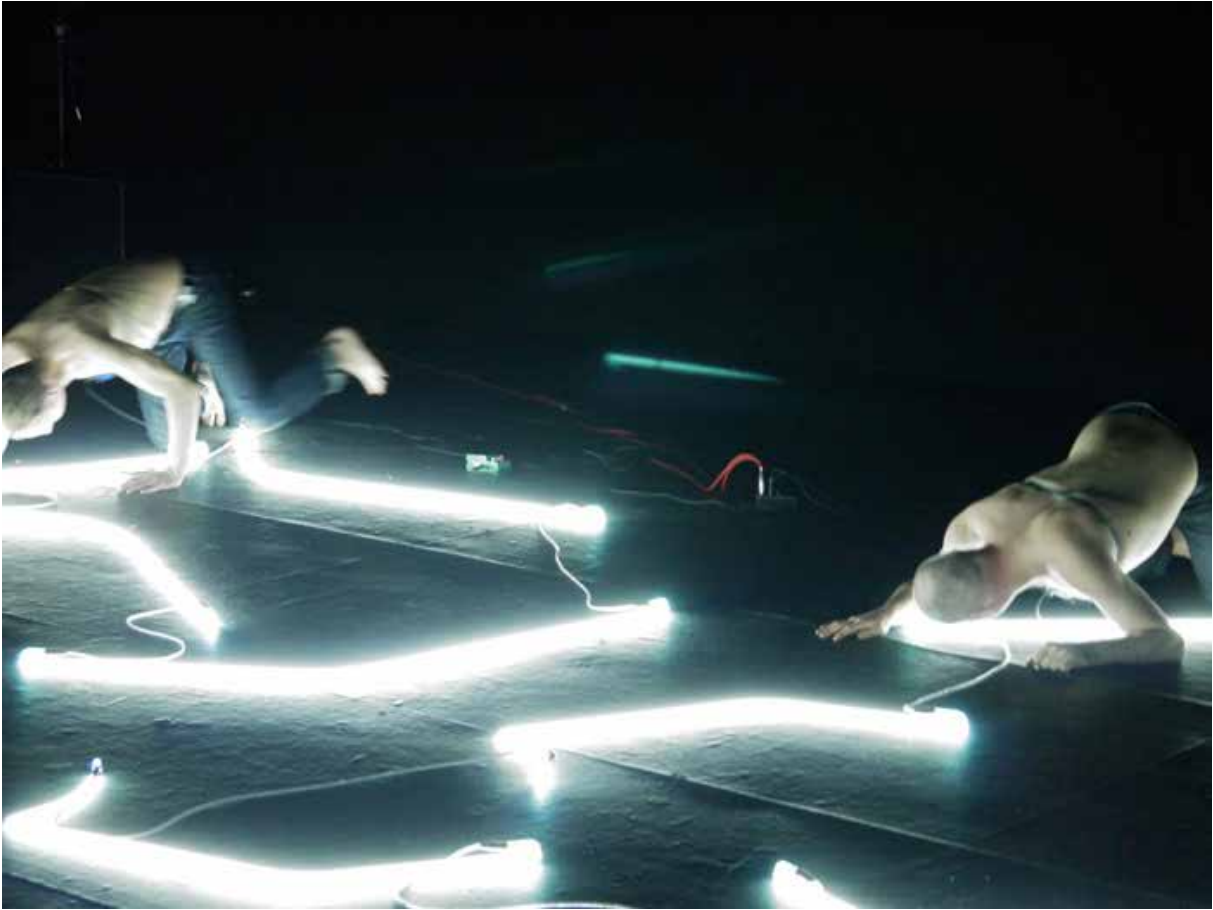


Image 11: *Two Ruins* at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2011)



Image 12: *Two Ruins* at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2011)

## Chapter 5.

### *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club (2012)

Subsequent to the performance at the Conservatoire in December 2011, we were invited by Patrick Jameson to undertake a residency at Queens Park Railway Club gallery, which he runs with Leanne Hopper, during November and December of 2012. Queens Park Railway Club is a small gallery space based in a previously derelict train station waiting room on the platform at the Queens Park station of the low-level train system on the south-side of Glasgow.

In this work Jim Colquhoun and I discussed producing work that would move beyond just performance with neon to have other elements within the space to expand the range of possibilities we were developing. The piece that resulted was eponymously called *Two Ruins* and combined a found text by American artist, Chris Burden, and sculptural neon elements that would remain in the space after the performance almost as relics.

For the opening night, Jim Colquhoun and I decided that our performance would again use proximity oscillators which would be more controllable if held in our hands than if taped to our chests (as before). This would enable us to create sound which was still very basic - consisting of rumbling feedback and then rising pitches of single notes but able to be more at our command than before as we crawled over the neon. Being able to place the oscillators at various locations on the neon, meant we could create sound more predictably.

The show opened at 7pm and we were due to start our performance at 7.30pm. We were already in place on the black disc on which we would perform. Crouched down and bare chested with bare feet as if we had been shipwrecked and washed up among black acrylic and neon. We were frozen in time until the moment the timer was to switch on at 7.30pm. A crowd had arrived and were in the first space and outside the gallery because it was already overcrowded. We had set the timer to a 15-minute interval to dictate the length of the performance which would end as soon as the timer switch flicked the neon off.



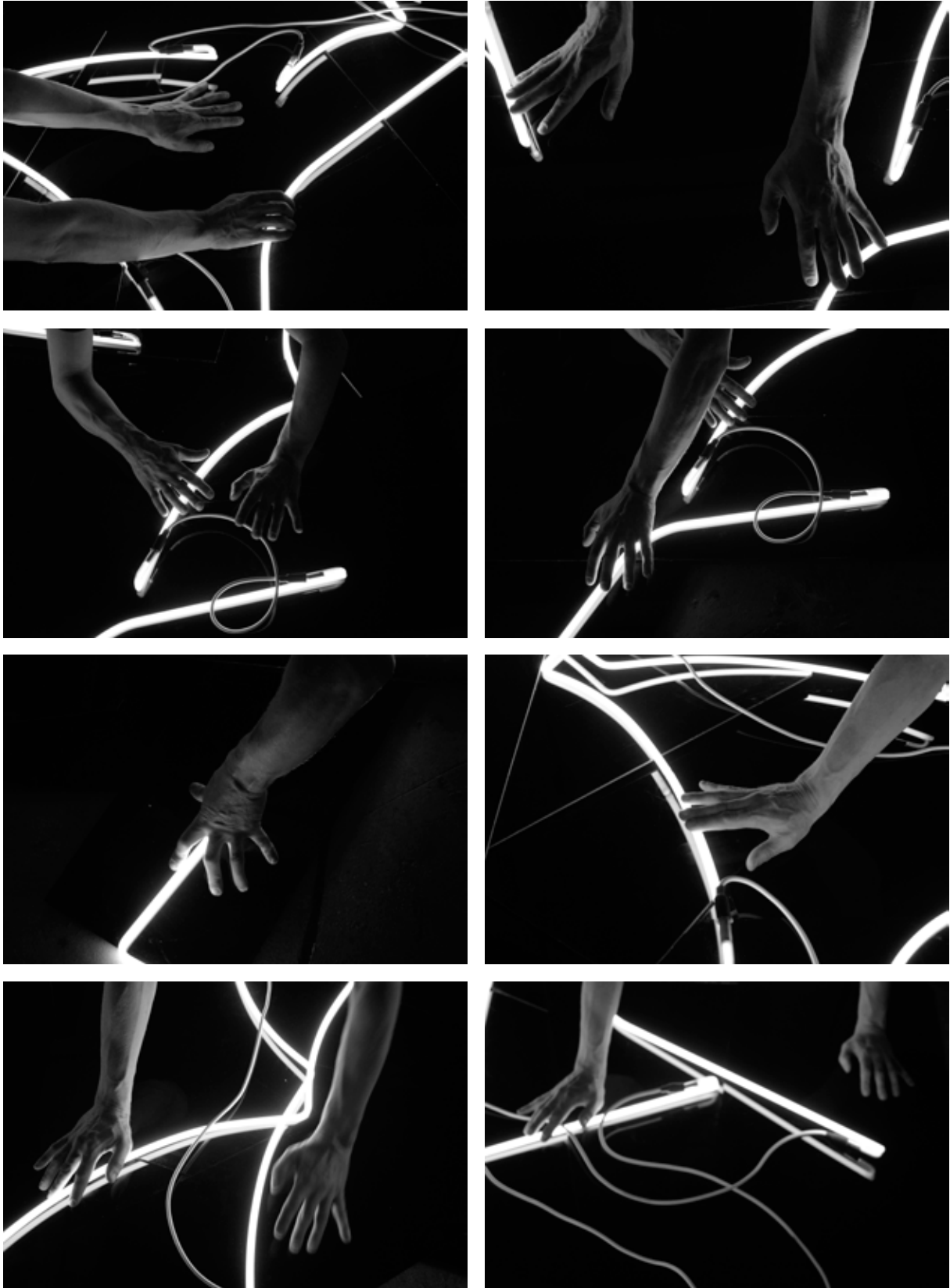


Image 13: Grid Image, work in progress prior to installation at Queens Park Railway Club (2012)



Image 14 & 15: Work in progress prior to installation at Queens Park Railway Club (2012)



Image 16: *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club, installation view (2012)



Image 17: *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club, installation view (2012)



Image 18: Text by Jim Colquhoun overlaid with neon sound wave forms (2012)

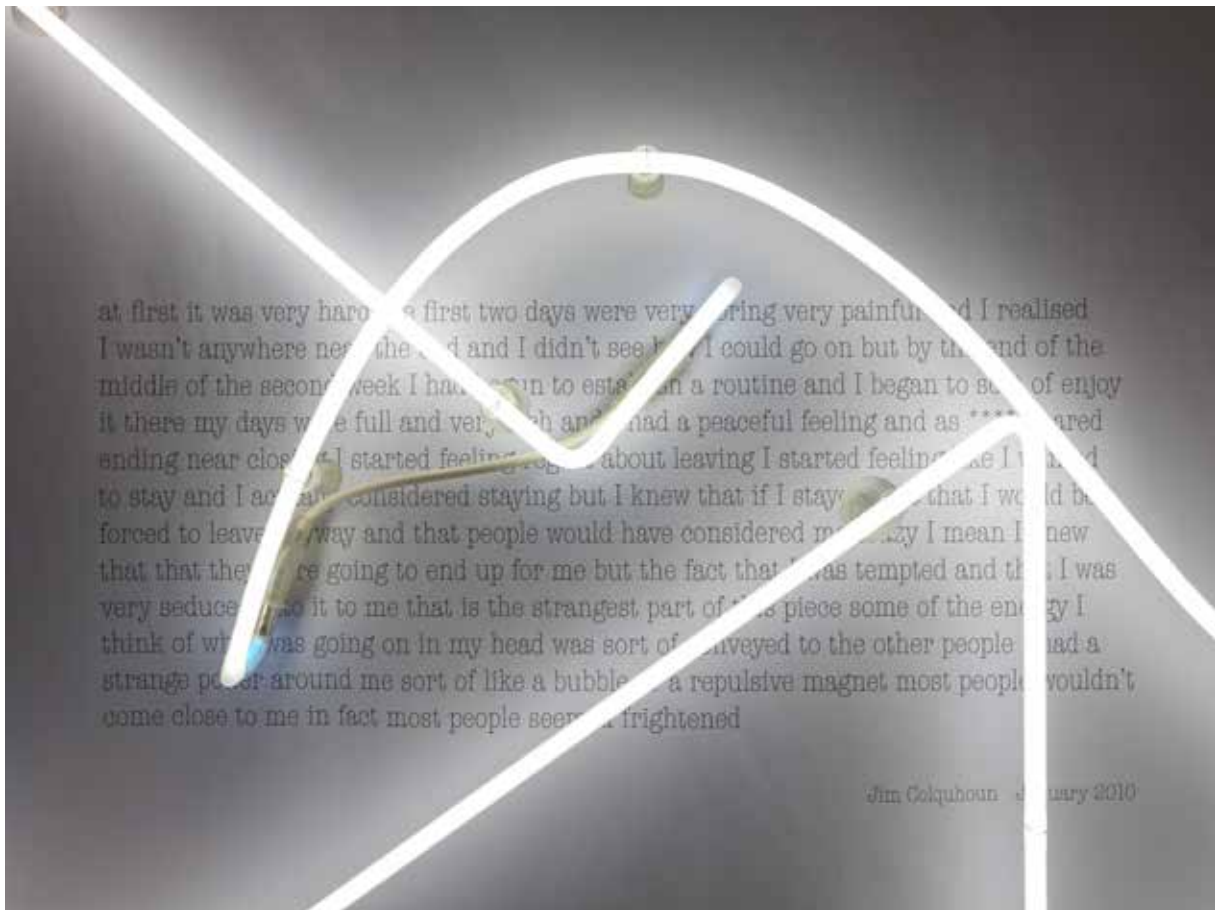


Image 19: *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club. Detail of text (2012)

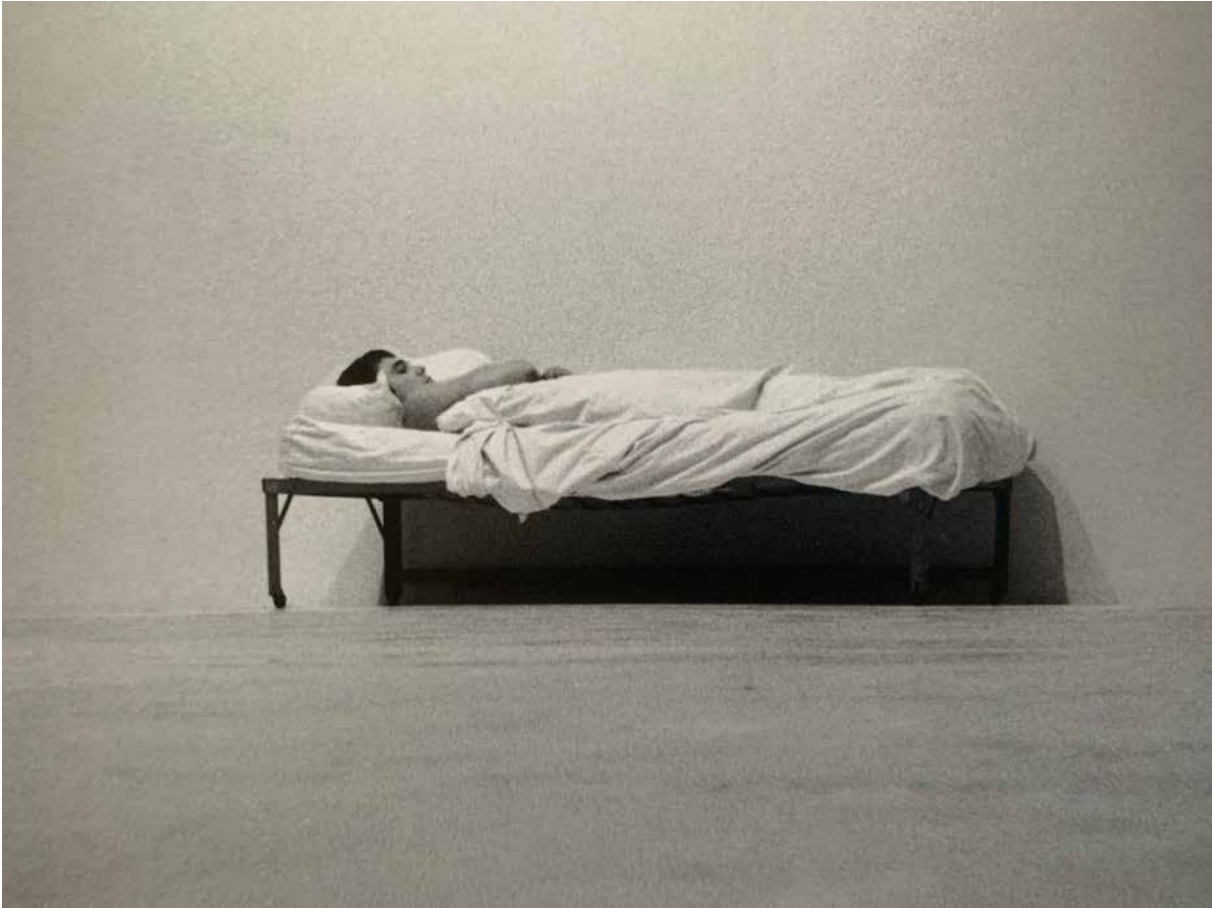


Image 20: Chris Burden, Bed Piece (1972)



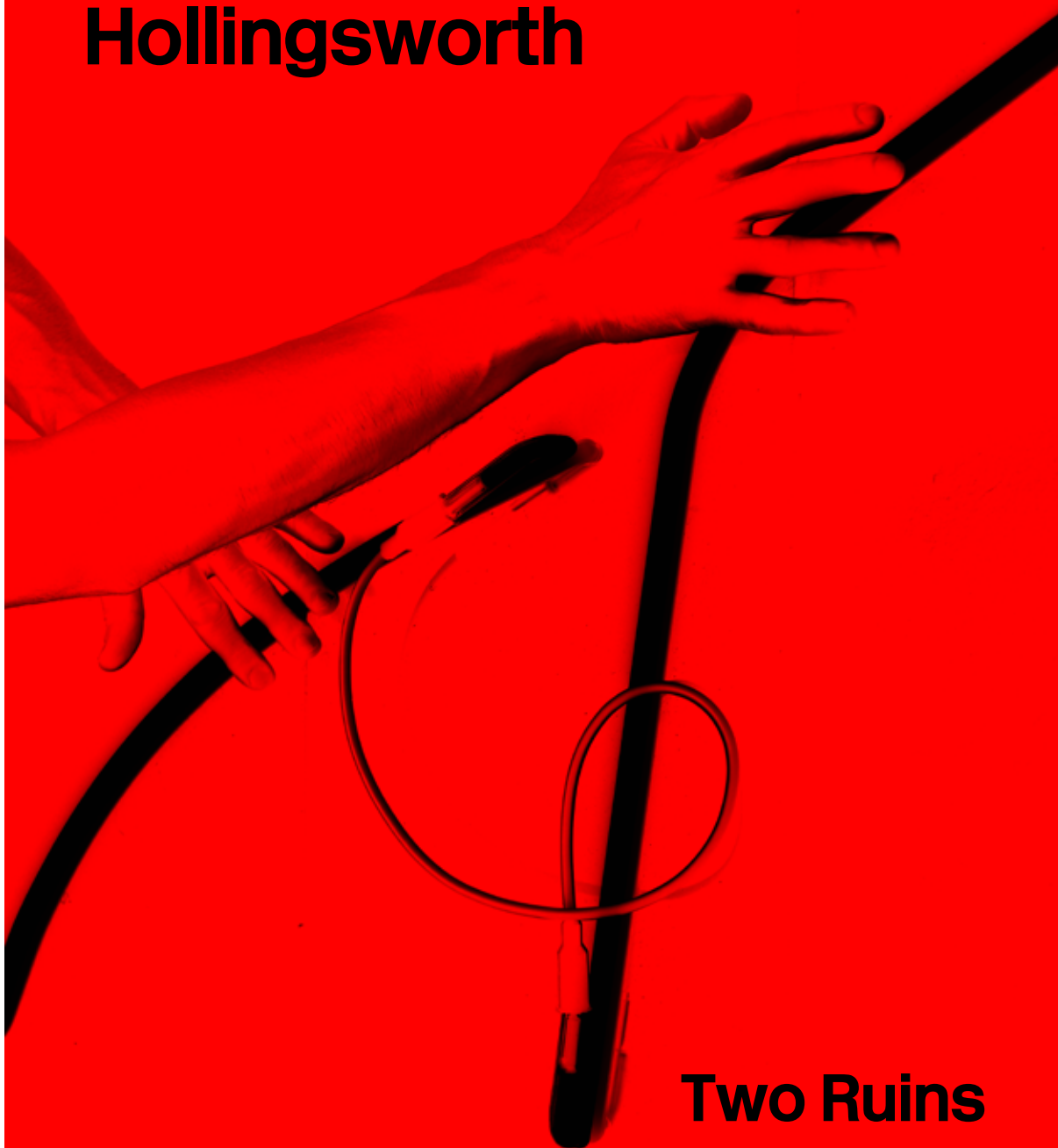
Image 21 & 22: *Two Ruins* at Queens Park Railway Club exterior and interior of gallery space during performance (2012)





Image 23: Queens Park Railway Club (2012)

# Colquhoun & Hollingsworth



## Two Ruins

Queens Park Railway Club  
Tuesday 20th November to Saturday 8th December  
Gallery open 2 to 6 - Tuesday to Saturday  
[Queensparkrailwayclub.co.uk](http://Queensparkrailwayclub.co.uk)



Image 24: *Two Ruins*, publicity poster (2012)

## Chapter 6.

### ***Blind Sight*** Performance at Plug 3, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2013)

The piece *Blind Sight* began from feeling frustrated about my status as a visual artist as a PhD student studying at a Conservatoire. I felt a need to challenge the context of musicianship and virtuosity, to assert my identity and stress a different register of meaning away from musical expertise prevalent in the institution. I met Alison McGillivray, a gamba player, and through our collaboration and the process of working together this piece came about which challenged an audience to consider new meanings.



Image 25: Steve Hollingsworth and Alison McGillivray (2013)



Image 26: Film still of back projection used during performance (2013)

## Chapter 7.

### *The Hyperboreans* at Queens Park Railway Club (2014)

The *Hyperboreans* was inspired by a desire to work in a context of nature, to perform in and to produce a film from our interactions with what we found there, together with specially fabricated neon. Jim Colquhoun and I, together with Queens Park Railway Club Gallery Co-Curator, Patrick Jameson, set off on the allotted day to Rosneath on the Clyde estuary. We had asked Patrick to film us and also to feed into the work process as another collaborator in the creative process.

We took two battery-powered amplifiers and two neon proximity oscillators, cameras and tripods and food supplies for the day.

We began by making a fire and the cold winter air made the smoke linger. In the near distance was a plain brick building, heavily fortified with a large antenna and many cameras jutting from its walls. Unmarked but with a glowing red light atop the antenna, it made a paranoid impression on me, as it was surely MOD property to listen on the Loch and its unseen nuclear submarines and other activity; I wondered if our presence was being noted.

The name *Hyperboreans*, is taken from Greek mythology and means an inhabitant of the extreme north. In myth, Hyperborea was a fantastic realm, where it was forever Spring, and its people were blessed with long life. In using this name, we were referencing idealised nature in opposition to the rubbish strewn site of Rosneath.



Image 27: *The Hyperboreans*, neon sign (2014)



Image 28: *The Hyperboreans*, gallery exterior (2014)

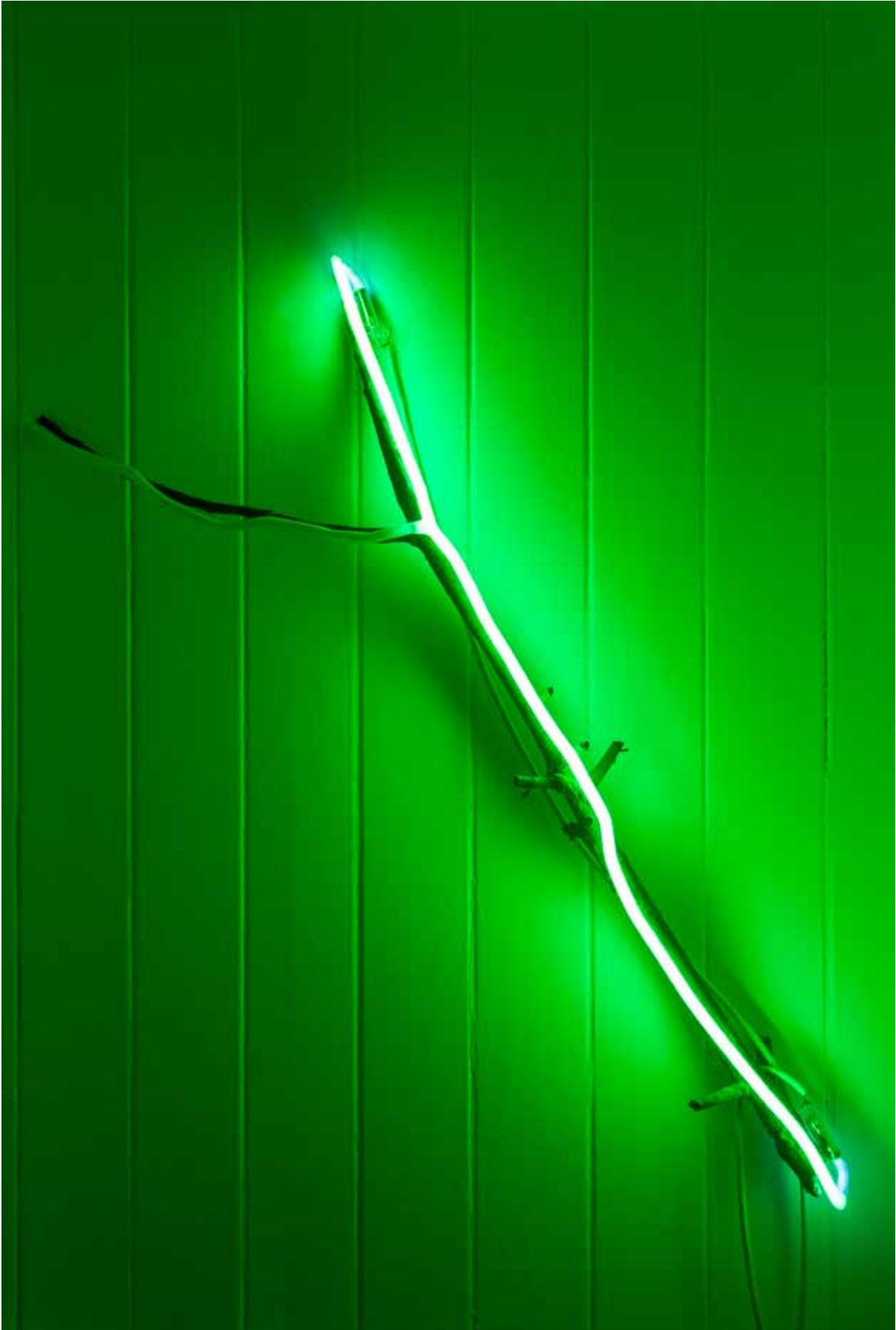


Image 29: *The Hyperboreans*, Twig (2014)



Image 30: *The Hyperboreans*, installation view (2014)



ENTROPY WITH PINES, WATER AND MONUMENTAL INACTION

I awake now surging with the usual perplexity of mind which accompanies the return of consciousness, an ectopic sound of decay, systems running down to disorder and finally a numbing emptiness, as my thoughts, which a deep and apparently dreamless sleep had dissolved, began again to assume crystalline forms, the strange events of the foregoing day presented themselves anew to my wandering consciousness.

"It is a very strange place, but I scarcely know how to convey the impression it made upon me. It will all sound so simple and ordinary. There is nothing but disordered pines and shaggy moss-covered boulders. The stream running slowly, and more sluggishly, forms a stagnant pool there of some considerable extent, from which some sickly-looking trees seem to fling themselves backward, as if unwilling to approach it, a dead willow leans above the pool, tangling its wan skeletal reflections with the green moss that settles the pond."

Cracked, broken, shattered the walls threatened to come crashing down. Fragmentation, surprise, decomposition, disintegration, rock streep debris, mud-flow sliding to avalanche everywhere in evidence. The grey sky seems to swallow up the trees at fractures and faults spill forth rotting debris. It is a drowned region, heavy with rot and an infinity of surfaces spread in every direction, a chaos of conglomerates attempting to engulf us.

Then, as an sliding light shuts down in many wet oblivion and dishevelled figures crumple around like highpollined Antelope a scuff of detritus invades this lost forest - a sin of plastic, styrofoam, nylon blown up by sinuous tidal surges, deeper in there is only brown green dent, a catastrophe of blown-down pine's, a post-apocalyptic vacancy filled with twittering, howling and a distant booming rumble. It is bigger on the inside this place, big enough to swallow up these tiny figures and everything they represent. They gather in a glade run awamp and divest themselves of their clothing, their bits and bobs and unnumbered they move into the interior, pale beams illuminating the gathering dark.

Image 31: *The Hyperboreans*, Jim Colquhoun text, *Entropy with Pines, Water and Monumental Inaction* (2014)



Image 32: *The Hyperboreans*, film test shot (2014)



Image 33: *The Hyperboreans*, film still (2014)



Image 34: *The Hyperboreans*, film still (2014)



Image 35: *The Hyperboreans*, gallery exterior during opening night (2014)



Image 36: *The Hyperboreans*, gallery interior during opening night (2014)



Image 37: *The Hyperboreans*, gallery interior during opening night (2014)

# Colquhoun Hollingsworth Two Ruins

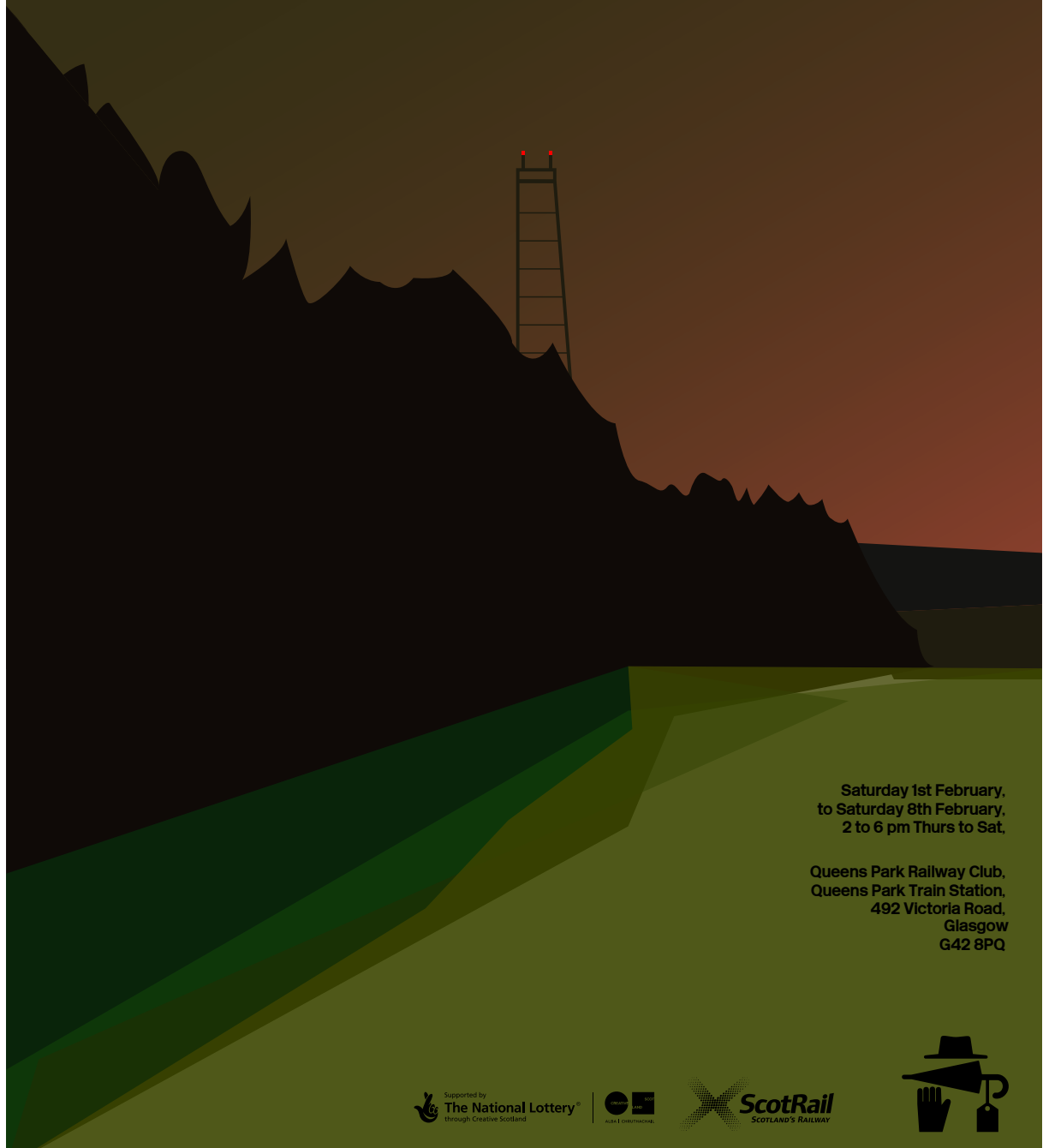


Image 38: *The Hyperboreans*, publicity poster (2014)



Image 39 & 40: *The Hyperboreans*, performance images (2014)



Image 41: *The Hyperboreans*, performance installation (2014)

## Chapter 8.

### *The Profane Illuminations* (2014)

This film was produced at the 15th century, Myres Castle in Auchtermuchty, Fife, where we filmed over the course of a day and had free reign in how we used the spaces available to us. Patrick Jameson again fed into the creative process by both filming us and offering creative suggestions as we discussed our intentions regarding the filming. Using an improvisational mode, we let the castle almost unconsciously speak to us without having a strict filming schedule which may have constricted ideas. We improvised filming, being drawn to objects and the atmospheres we found in the many spaces and rooms. We also used a professional actor, Tam Dean Burn, to feature in the film. Tam has an ability to intensely evoke power in some of the characters he plays. In this film, his intensity comes through when he directly stares at the camera, and therefore at the viewer, in an unsettling way. Tam plays a character that has an ambiguous relationship to both of us and he could be either tormentor, saviour, or figment of our imaginations or dreams.

Together with three actors and a cameraman, three neon pieces were also fabricated - two of which form a type of ball and the third, a neon, black light (UV) circle. I had also recorded various sounds from in, and around, my own home. These were incidental sounds but to me they became ambiguous and fascinating when unchained from their origin in a domestic environment and transposed to the castle. They serve to give the film a subtle, uncanny aspect. Where no immediate sound source can be seen, they help expand possible interpretations. The sounds are used in two ways: played directly in the space whilst filming, so the acoustic nature of the room affects the sound, and laid over film footage during the editing process.





Image 42: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)

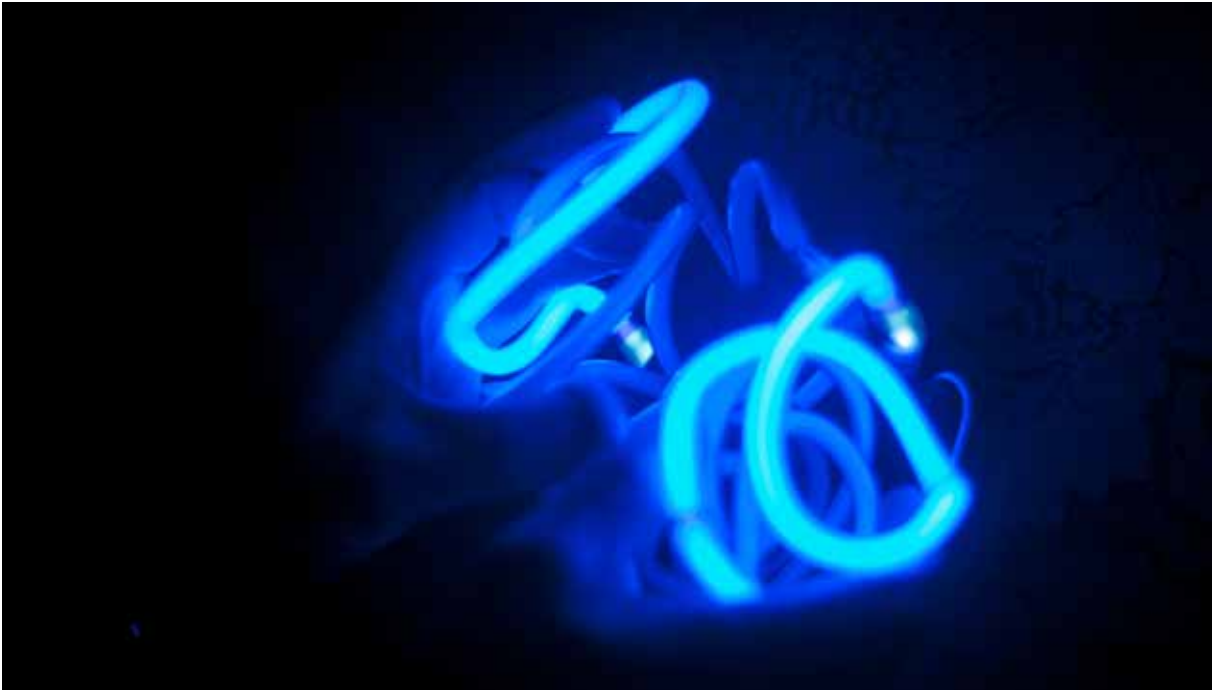


Image 43: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)



Image 44: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)



Image 45: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)

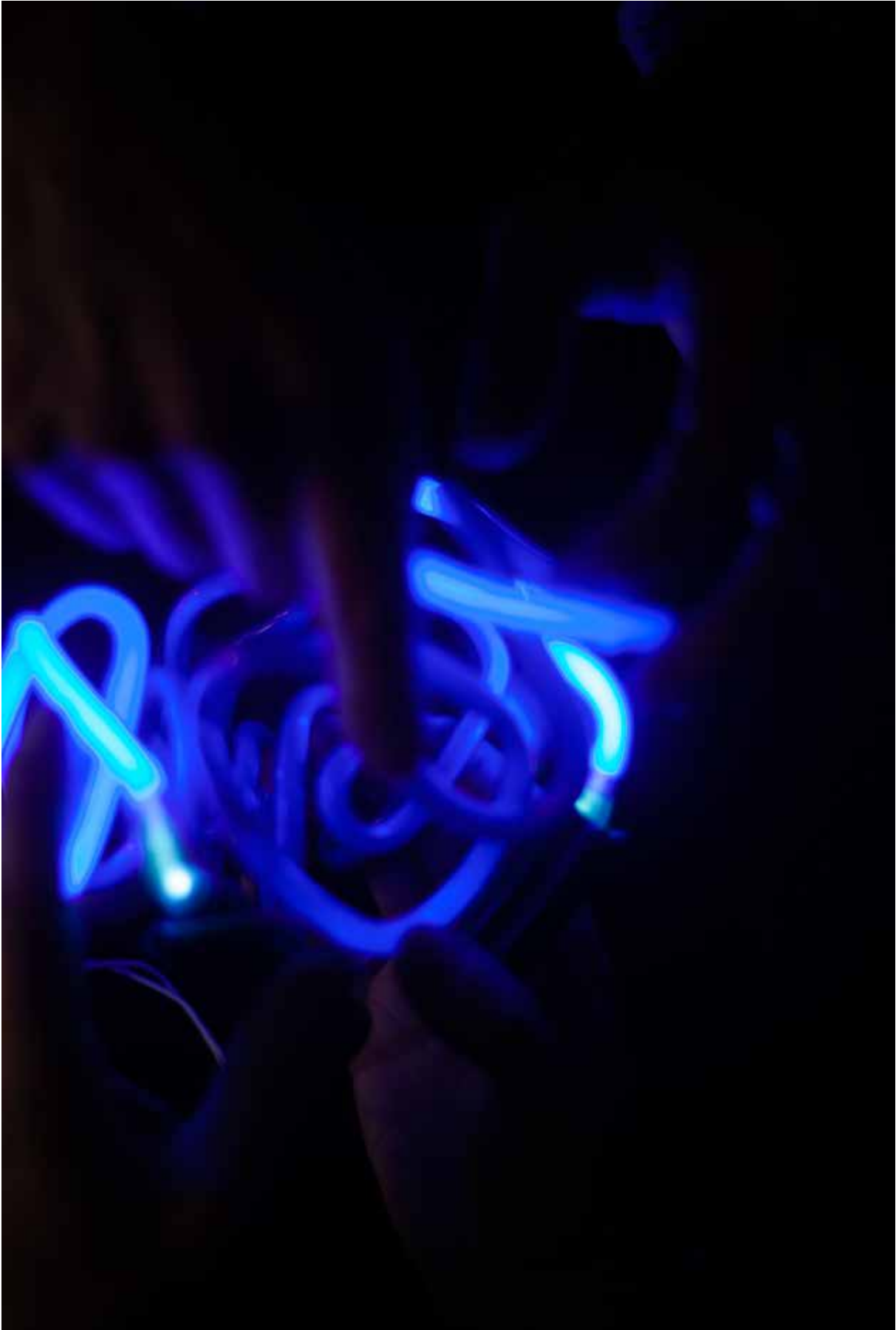


Image 46: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)



Image 47: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)



Image 48: *The Profane Illuminations*, performance (2014)



Image 49: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still, Tam Dean Burn (2014)



Image 50: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still, Tam Dean Burn (2014)



Image 51: *The Profane Illuminations*, film still (2014)



Image 52: *The Profane Illuminations*, performance (2014)



Image 53: *The Profane Illuminations*, performance (2014)



## Chapter 9.

### *A Voyage to Arcturus* Ekko Festival, Lydgalleriat, Bergen, Norway (2014)

The starting point for this work was Jim Colquhoun and I, reading *A Voyage to Arcturus* by David Lindsay (Lindsay, 1965), a novel from the 1920's. As I started to read the book, I was immediately seduced and fascinated by the overwhelmingly compelling and strange descriptions of an alien planet and the fantastical and extraordinary imagery. Many of its themes and ideas immediately appealed to me, including the mention of 'Arcturian back rays'; these light rays invert normal physical laws and exert a pulling force back to their origin, an incredible reversal of normal, physical laws. In doing so, they provide fuel for travel to the planet of the title. Although set within a science fiction genre, this is a thoughtful and philosophical book and in the context of extraordinary worlds tackles essentially human traits such as the struggle between good and evil. Nietzsche interested Lindsay greatly and these themes can be identified throughout the book as the dialectic between right and wrong perpetuate the narrative. More fundamentally the text also examines the very nature of reality as, I think, Lindsay was concerned that the world we perceive may be just a veil over a more fundamental, deeper reality that our sense organs are not equipped with to fully penetrate. The film uses the camera to interrogate our bodies as if to determine our inner nature. Neon appears to have developed agency in this piece, as it seems to be a conscious entity examining us through its strong light.

Ballantine



# A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS

"... one of the most brilliant flights of  
pure fancy ever recorded." THE TIMES

## DAVID LINDSAY

Introduction by Loren Eiseley

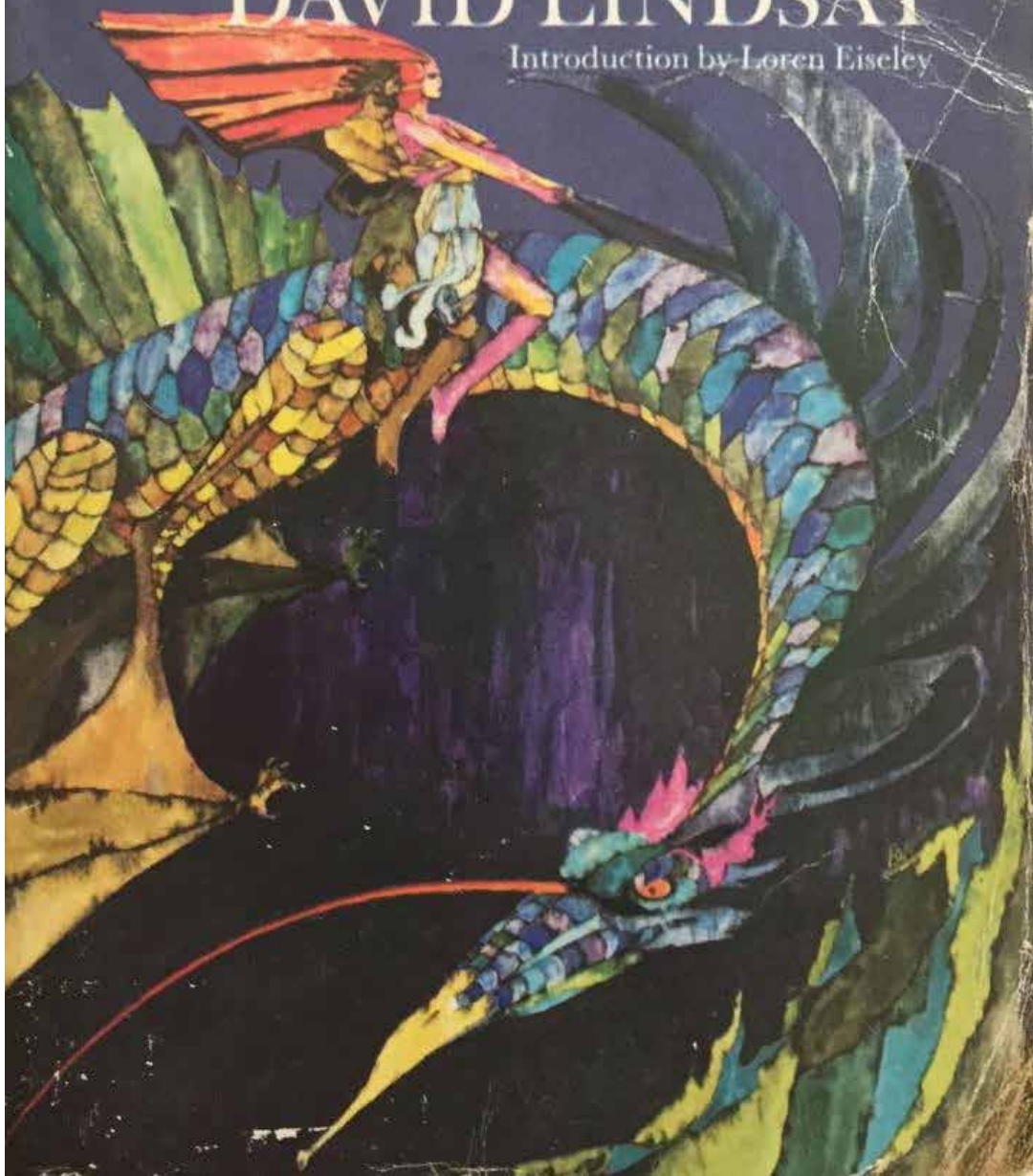


Image. 54. David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, published by Ballantine in 1972

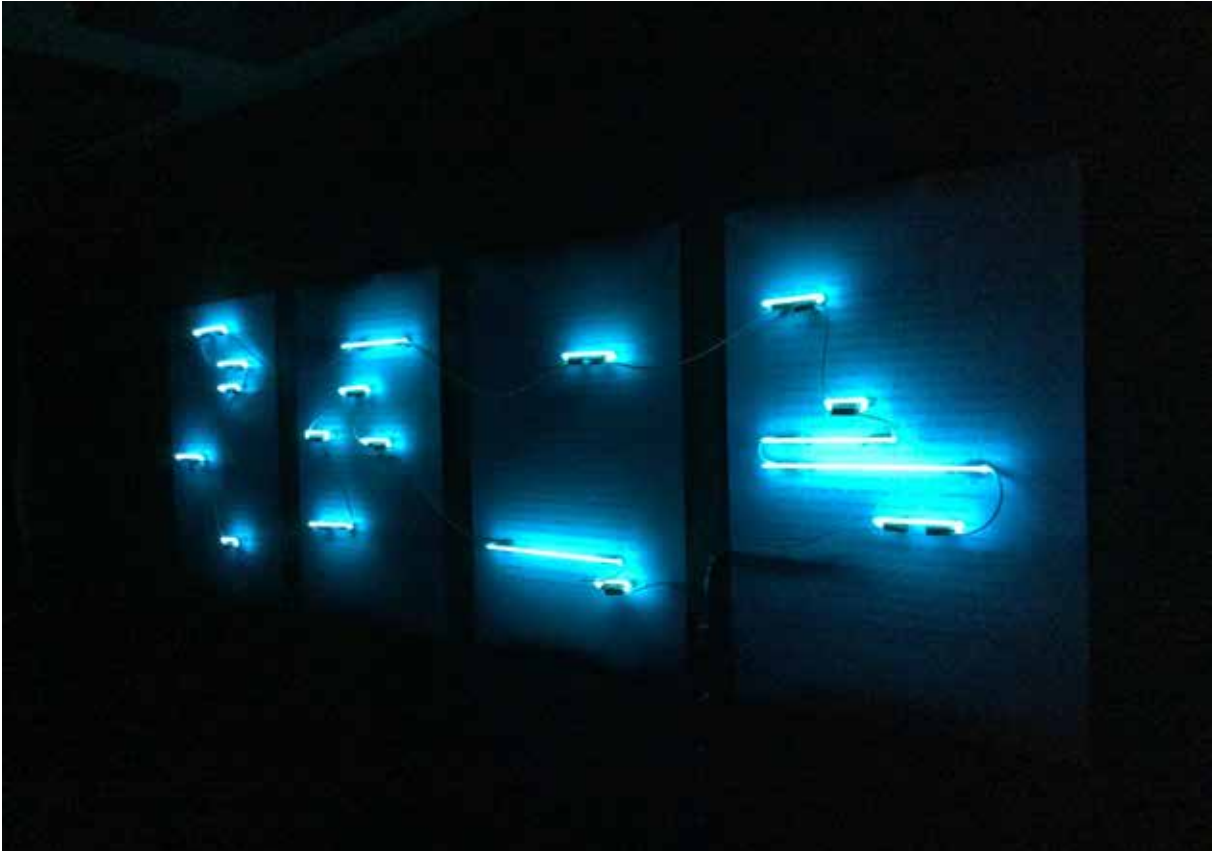


Image 55: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, text piece, *A Black Flag Unfurling* with neon (2014)

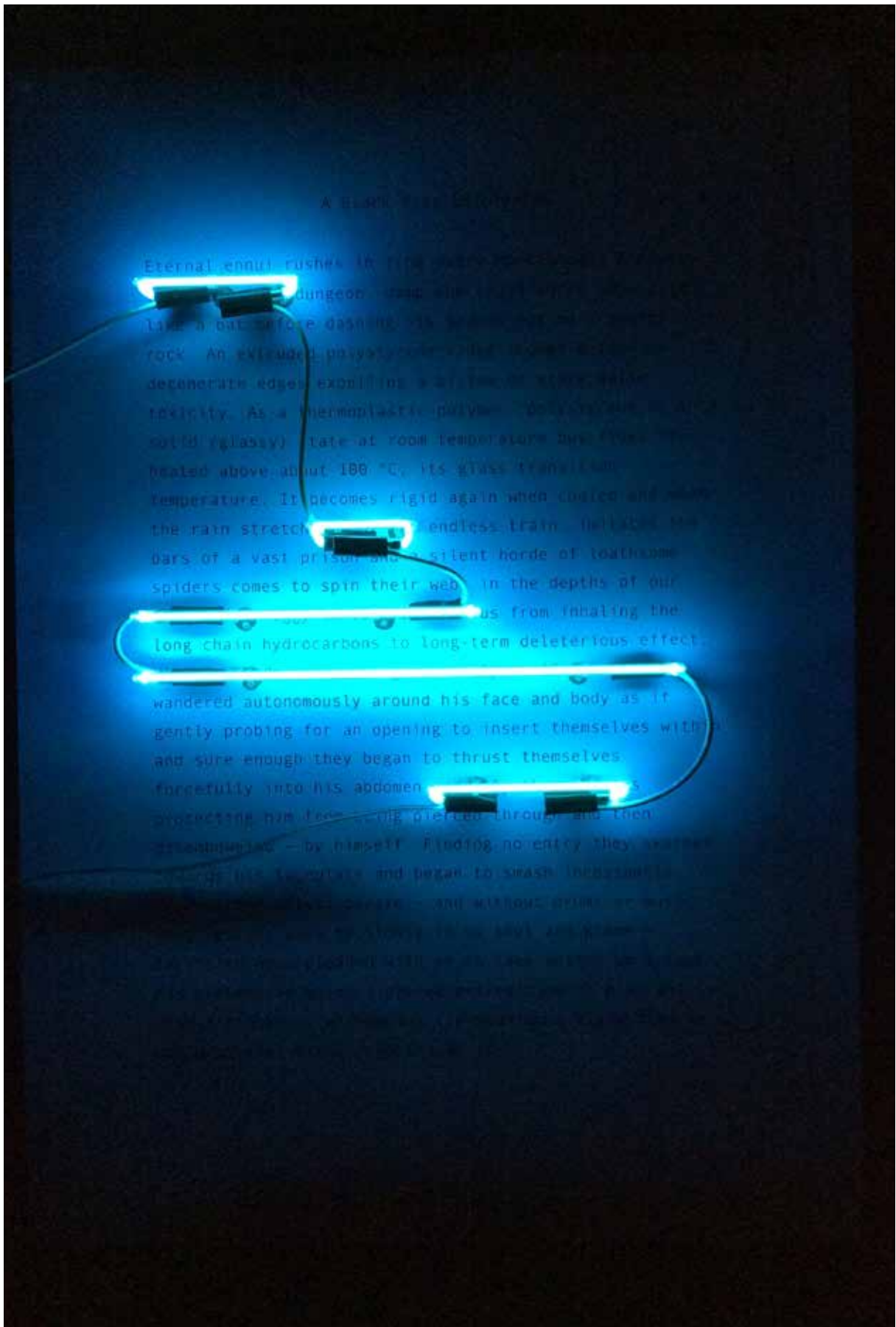


Image 56: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, text piece, *A Black Flag Unfurling with neon* (2014)



Image 57: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, text piece, *A Black Flag Unfurling* with neon (2014)

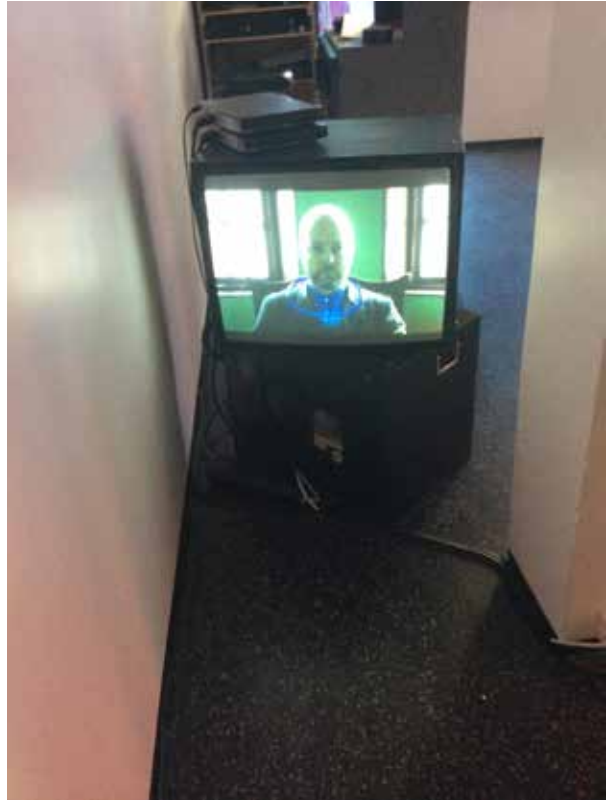


Image 58 & 59: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, video monitors placed outside installation entrance (2014)



Image 60: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, installation with smoke (2014)



Image 61: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, installation with smoke (2014)



Image 62: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, film still (2014)

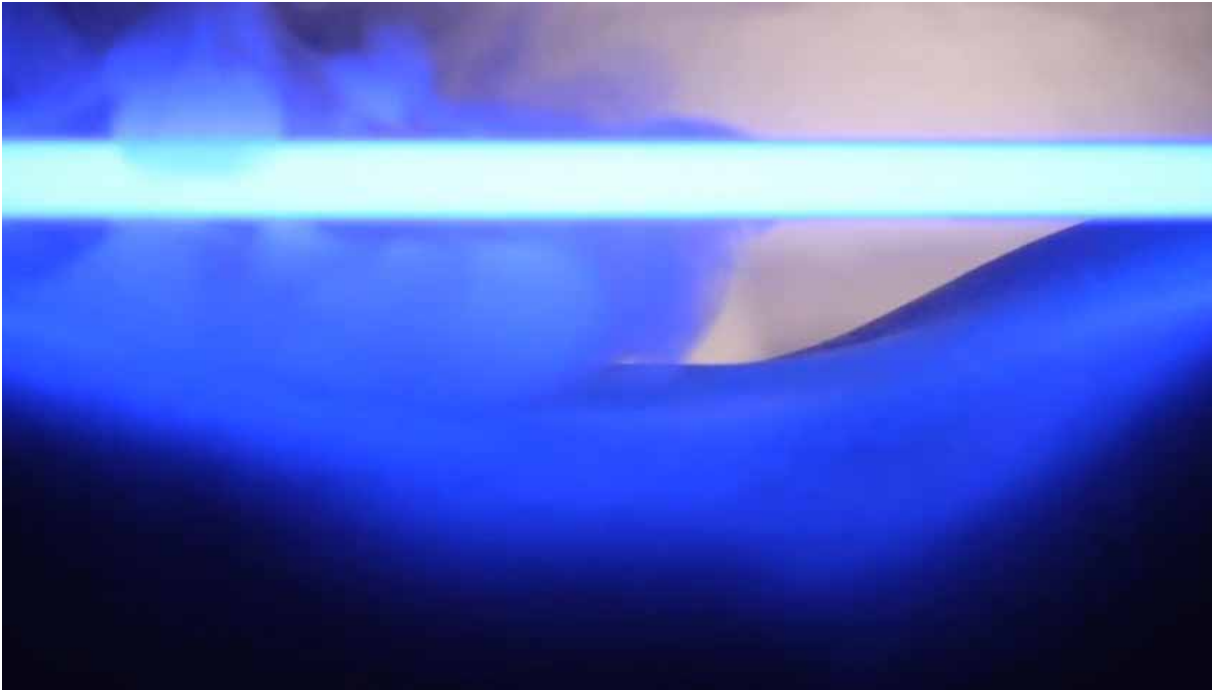


Image 63: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, film still (2014)





Image 64: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, film still (2014)

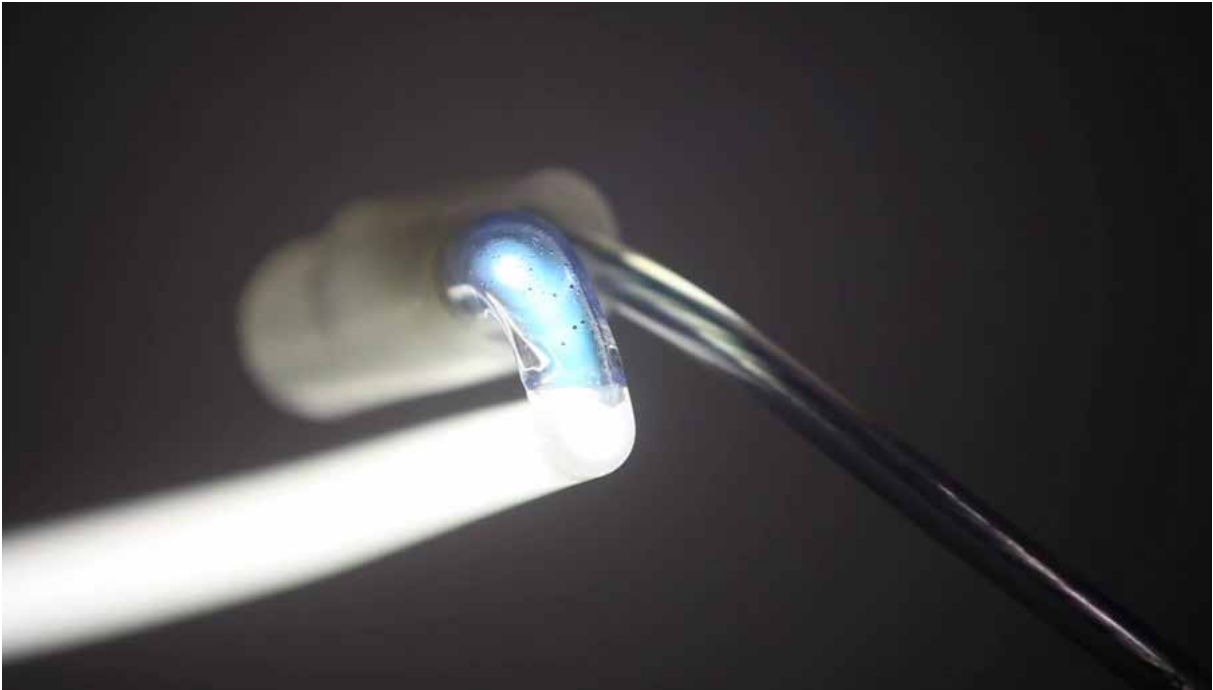


Image 65: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, film still (2014)

## Chapter 10.

### ***Blind Spot*** Tulca Festival of Visual Art, The Headless City, Galway, RI. (2016)

This piece started as an idea several years ago about how to use an old classic car as a component in a film or as a prop in a performance. This developed into a proposal for *Blind Spot* being sent to the Tulca Festival of Visual Arts in Galway, Ireland, which was accepted. Jim and I have always used this car as a kind of mobile studio on our journeys through to Edinburgh to work at Artlink. It became a private mobile studio and thought space in which to discuss ideas generally. The car (a Citroën CX) became a moving space of evolving thought and potential, above its utility as mere transportation. Slowly, through a growing body of work of our own performances, we began to see the potential in using the car as a way to take a new performance piece outside of a controlled gallery environment, to confront an audience in an urban space by using the car as a stage to frame a performance held within the car.

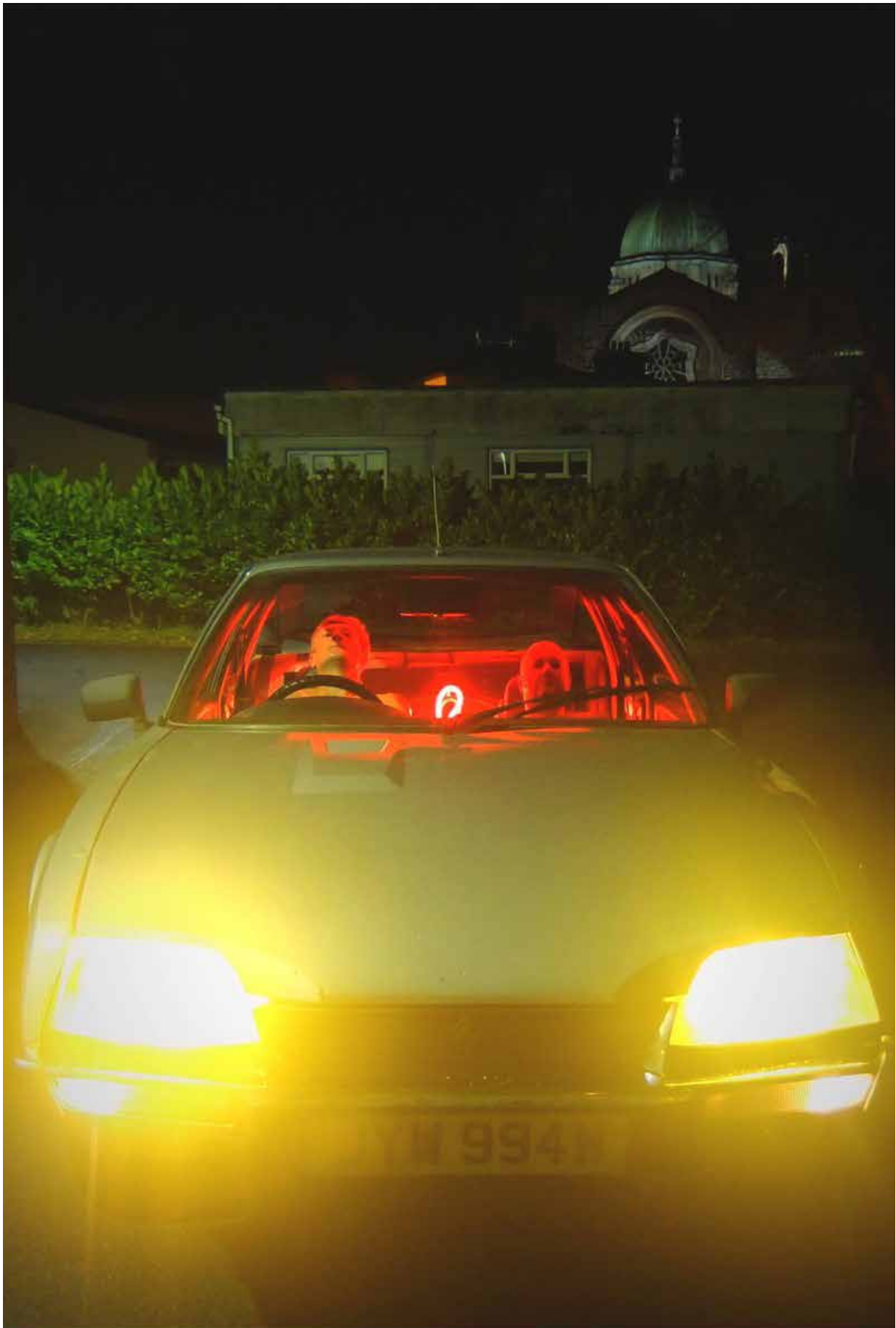


Image 66: *Blind Spot*, performance (2016)



Image 67: *Blind Spot*, performance (2016)



Image 68: *Blind Spot*, performance (2016)



Image 69: *Blind Spot*, performance (2016)



Image 70: *Blind Spot*, performance (2016)



Image 71: *Blind Spot, Two Ruins*, neon (2016)



Image 72: *Blind Spot*, performance (2016)