

indeterminate duration

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Abstract

Interiority, in relation to my practice, is the inherent curiosity to the notions of process, time and duration. It is a practice of mark making, marking time, making time, and time making; foregrounding duration and marking an occurrence. My technique is one of working responsively to interiors, allowing particular temporal conditions to surface within specific sites and situations. The marks – whether they be on a canvas, a house, a building, or within a gallery – materialise immateriality and allow the residue of particular processes to be assembled as collections of materialised and spatialised time. This paper discusses an artist residency undertaken in Detroit, USA 2017. Informed by existing watermarks, stains and rust encountered within abandoned spaces in Detroit, I initially responded by using found materials such as charcoal and ash from burnt houses, plant materials and liquids, to assemble process-based compositions on canvas. Further temporal interventions were then assembled in a number of situations within Detroit. This paper, and practice, notions that interiority is a field of interiors where the indeterminate is celebrated through the force of duration; immersion in time as flow. The temporal, material and immaterial are considered as a dynamic and confluence of forces; assembled in time, materialising immateriality.

Keywords: duration, time, process, material, immaterial

practising duration [for gilles]

My practice is primarily informed by the notion of duration. This is not a definition that describes an allocated length of time, rather, it is the notion that duration is immersion in time as flow. It is the immediate awareness of the temporality of mental life, and that the practice is “a sort of putting-into-orbit. The basic thing is how to get taken up in the movement of a big wave, a column of rising air, to ‘come between’ rather than to be the origin of an effort” (Deleuze, 1972). Through this, situations are encountered and traversed openly, indeterminately and with a range of techniques, arranging residues of processes that materialise and spatialise time.

I see time as the temporal engagement with a site and situation; time as a material that provides constraints and boundaries to creative works. In this way, the practice extends beyond spatial and material propositions through a consideration of time as process, time as content, and time as [im]material. The marks I make are in response to previous marks and, in this way, the practice is immersed in, and expressive of, time. The following statement from Gilles Deleuze, with reference to Henri Bergson, has become an ongoing provocation within my practice: “state problems and solve them in terms of time rather than space” (Deleuze, 1991, p. 31).

Creative works are all now considerations and experimentations of immersive processes that prioritise time as distinct from space, leaving open and not determining outcomes to works produced. This has enabled my practice to move from one that was defined (by myself and others) as a site-specific and spatial practice, to one that explores and manifests the concept of duration through a practice that is temporal, material and spatial. By being attentive to temporal qualities and conditions, it highlights that my research and practice foregrounds duration. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s reading of philosopher Henri Bergson’s concept of duration is an important reference for my thinking as Deleuze directly addresses duration in relation to concepts of space and time (Stagoll, 2005, p. 81).¹

Although my practice foregrounds the concept of duration, it undeniably operates materially, albeit in a temporal context. Another ongoing provocation within my practice is a statement from O’Sullivan (2008), who in *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New* comments that

¹ It is important to note that Deleuze’s reading of Bergson’s concept of duration is idiosyncratic and is not necessarily a direct translation of Bergson’s concept. Deleuze works with Bergson’s philosophy in relation to his own interests and concerns – and in a similar manner (albeit it as an artist/designer rather than a philosopher), I have picked up Deleuze’s Bergsonism and in particular the concept of duration and to work with it in my practice.

The new does not arrive from some 'other place' (transcendence), but is produced from the very matter of the world, after all what else is there? And where else can the new come from? The new then involves a recombination of already existing elements in and of the world (a new dice throw as Deleuze might say). The new would then be a repetition, but with difference. (p. 91)

This exemplifies that throughout my creative projects, similar techniques and processes are undertaken within sites and situations, that in combination with differing materiality, produce repetitions but with differences. Immersed in time as flow, I am "attentive to particular [temporal] qualities and conditions with which [to] make [material] connections and arrangements" (Attiwill, 2015).

Embedded within my creative practice is also the notion of the immaterial. This is an understanding and expansion of past histories of sites and situations, and also includes a highlighting and celebration of the process in relation to the temporality of my creative practice. In my creative research practice, I am concerned with what surfaces through the project work (material/immaterial), and the recognition that the creative research practice engages with the material and the immaterial both/and at the same time. The term immaterial facilitates discoveries within projects (the way light reflects off a polished timber floor, for example), and these discoveries are subsequently responded to through a variety of techniques and processes. More recently, I refer to the immaterial as a confluence of forces coming together *in time*.

hamtramck [for popps]

In June and July 2017, I undertook an artist residency at Pops Packing in Hamtramck, Michigan, USA. Hamtramck is a separate city within, and surrounded by, the city of Detroit. In the late eighteenth-hundreds, some local shopkeepers (mainly German immigrants) saw potential in the industries already established, the tax concessions in remaining separate to Detroit, the fact that two major railroads ran through Hamtramck connecting it to the outside USA, and the need to protect its already flourishing, cultural identity. When the Dodge Motor Group set up a factory in Hamtramck in 1908, the city saw a huge influx of Polish immigrants that even in 2010, nearly fifteen percent of Hamtramck's population considered themselves Polish. More recently, however, there has been a large number of immigrants from the Middle East who have settled in Hamtramck. Considering the political and social climate of the USA more broadly in 2017, the city of Hamtramck had sitting Muslim councillors on

the Local City Council, representing the extensive and diverse community.

I had never travelled to Detroit nor Hamtramck, and after this initial research into the histories and contemporary contexts of both cities, I began to think of Hamtramck as an island in the ocean that is Detroit. I have in the past made connections with my creative research practice and my passion for surfing; that these two practices are open, responding to a confluence of forces that come together in time; a foregrounding of duration, immersion in time as flow. At Pops Packing, there was access to some fantastic old bicycles, and I borrowed one daily to navigate the 'waves' of Hamtramck and Detroit. The bicycle was at first a navigational tool, but it became a drawing device, marking time and my presence riding through dirt, dust and water, traversing terrain, ebbing and flowing.

Thinking through this, these excursions made into Detroit as an ocean connected to a comment made by Grosz (2005): "Duration is the 'field' in which difference lives and plays itself out" (p. 4). Detroit was an ocean, this 'field' perhaps; an immersion with temporal flow and with difference. Furthermore, Pont (2017) elaborates on the notion of the field where she comments that:

The practitioner becomes a site where responsiveness is more, rather than less, likely. The practitioner is responsible insofar as she is aware of, or embedded within, networks in which she participates and reacts, in which she is *affected*. From one perspective, she has arguably harmonised forces 'within' herself, so as to be capable of a response from a specific, but non-static, site within a field. (pp. 19-20)

Here, I began to recognise the many different fields in operation during the residency; the responsive field within myself, the field of the studio at Pops Packing, the field (island) of Hamtramck, and the field (ocean) of greater Detroit. If then, I was to practice across multiple 'fields', they could also be thought of as multiple interiors; interiority as a temporal field (ocean) of interiors.

traversing indeterminately

When I first arrived in Hamtramck, it was clear to me the vast and supportive community that existed at Pops Packing. I was well aware of the foreign interest in Detroit due to its immense potential with sites and situations suitable for creative investigations. I was also aware that many had come to Detroit to explore and make creative work without showing the arts and design communities, nor the greater Detroit population, a level of respect they should

have been given. For this reason, I resisted the urge to explore the array of potential sites without having spoken first to those that lived there. Like with surfing a spot for the first time, this was a great way to enter the ocean, tagging along with some artists and locals exploring some of their favourite sites throughout the cities. Here, a field surfaces; the field of conversation, another interior.

I began with the foraging and collecting of materials found during my early excursions in Hamtramck and out into Detroit. I salvaged pieces of charcoal from burnt out buildings and houses, I picked mulberries and pulped them into liquids, and I collected pieces of similar sized timber from wherever I could. These materials were taken back to the studio where, having been inspired by stains and water damage in abandoned houses and buildings, I started to make paintings that emulated these encounters. These paintings were made using the charcoal found from buildings and houses, mulberries, water (sometimes dirty), red wine, acrylic paint and varnish. The materials were rubbed, brushed and poured onto canvases, slowly staining them and becoming part of the field of the studio (Figure 1). The aim during the residency was to make one of these paintings each day, marking time in the studio through the slow gesture of staining canvas. However, the process itself determined the eventual number of paintings, and I was only able to assemble twenty-four in total, four short of the total number of days spent at Popp.



Figure 1
Studio - 17.7.17

The lengths of timber I salvaged also became markers of time; one collected each day during the residency and twenty-eight in total.

I painted each piece of timber white in order to bring attention to it as an object, to revalue it, to not regard it as mere detritus strewn to the side of the road and forgotten to history. By bringing them into the studio, and eventually into the Popp's Packing gallery for an exhibition at the end of the residency, it re-contextualised them, bringing a secondary valuing to these discarded banalities. Each piece of timber, once painted white, was also wrapped with green painter's tape seven inches from the top, highlighting a spatial difference in each object; a difference in length, a difference in time.

wall wash [for billy] 2017

I enter the house and step over a decaying Detroit possum. They're large. There's an old couch, chairs, a desk, cushions, mattresses, a milk crate, peeling paint from the ceiling, empty liquid chemical bottles, insect eaten advertising flyers, an empty tube of tinea cream, some flossing sticks; a random and endless array of object objects and detritus, shed from everyday life. I walk through a corridor towards the back of the house and see it is severely fire damaged. Walking, I feel beneath my feet that the surface is changing, and looking down, that random and endless array of object objects and detritus has increased in density, forcing the floor surface to become more like walking on stairs that continually change their vertical orientation. Approaching the burnt out back of the house, I notice that the surrounding trees have begun to reclaim their turf, some growing inside this burnt section of the house, and the colour and contrast between the blackened timber and bright green foliage is breathtaking (Figure 2).



Figure 2
Burnt back of the
house - detail

I spend a few hours looking around, picking things up and photographing. Slowly through this process, elements of the house come in and out of focus. I hadn't noticed earlier, but behind the couch is a gold-tinted tiled wall (Figure 3). I spend time with the wall, walking towards it, back from it, around it, and as such, new spatial ambiguities materialise. I rub at a tile with my thumb and realise that the gold tint is, in fact, dust and grime accumulated over time. I clear the couch and other detritus away from the wall to get a better look and I see the potential in cleaning the tiled wall itself, allowing the materiality of the mirror to the surface (Figure 4).



Figure 3
wall wash [for
billy] 2017 - gold-
tinted tiled wall
behind the couch



Figure 4
wall wash [for
billy] 2017 -
process



Figure 5
wall wash [for
billy] 2017

I return to the studio and fill a large bucket with hot soapy water, find a small brush and towel, and quickly return to the house where I begin to scrub the wall furiously. I use a chair found in the house to stand on to reach the higher tiles, sometimes slipping off from all the soapy water being thrown about. Slowly the mirror becomes, and I intermittently stand back from the wall to see that this process of cleaning the tiles is producing new sightlines, pushing light in and through the house. I stand back on the chair and clean the tiles over and over for four hours, trying to remove as best I can the years-long build-up of dust and grime.

I'm exhausted, sit down on the wet chair and look into the mirror, my eye constantly moving about the wall, immersed in this new spatial doubling. The interior of the house has become slightly lighter, and like the trees breathing new life into the burnt space at the back of the house, the mirrored wall begins to illuminate the interior, revaluing it and reflecting myself within its open potential [figure 5].

traversing indeterminately

During those initial days of being shown around greater Detroit by some of the local artists and designers, we visited Lafayette Park, a large complex of townhouses and three large buildings, designed by Mies van der Rohe (Figure 6). Lafayette Park was planned as a large, post-war, modernist housing development and was constructed between 1956 and 1959. I had been shown an aerial photograph from 1957 of the site and surrounding it were houses as far as the eye could see. This was a reflection of the booming industrial economy at the time and Detroit's city population in 1959 was nearly two million. Riding my bike through Lafayette Park and its neighbouring

suburbs, it seemed now that the areas surrounding Lafayette park had been slated like the original site in the 1957 photograph, highlighting Detroit's temporality and sixty years of dramatic change and difference in the city. Lafayette Park in 2017 was another island in Detroit's ocean.



Figure 6
Townhouses in
Mies van der
Rohe's Lafayette
Park, Detroit

Eastern Market, the largest historic public market district in the USA, is situated north and adjacent to Lafayette Park. The Dequindre Cut is a bike path and greenway that traverses north-south through both districts, and if you continue riding south, you eventually arrive at the Detroit River. This river is part of the international boundary with Canada, which you can see from the Detroit side on a clear day.

Back in Eastern Market on the corner of Orleans and Wilkins Streets, I encountered an abandoned building that seemed to appropriate Mies' townhouse façade (Figure 7). The building felt that it had had some recent maintenance and renovation work with its partially constructed blackened steel window frames and newly poured sections of concrete. Its interior was filthy as the open western façade has allowed the wind to blow in dust, dirt and mountains of trash. Its big enough for me to ride my bike in it, so I traverse through room upon room, carry my bike up and down some stairs and continue to ride on the first floor and roof. The building is beautiful; plants are growing in puddles, rusted sections of steel lay on the floor, shafted light pours downward from gaping holes in the roof and the noise of dripping water echoes cavernously.

Figure 7
The building
at Orleans and
Wilkins Streets,
Detroit (Image
courtesy of
Juliette Pépin)



orleans & wilkins floor sweep [for régis] 2017

I return the following day with a broom and a respirator. I situate a floor area that resembles the floor plate of one of Mies' Lafayette townhouses, put on the respirator and begin to sweep (Figure 8). I continue this process for four hours, returning to the spot that I started in and sweep the area again, and again, and again. A textured and uneven brick floor beneath surfaces through the process. I assemble a small pile of dust and dirt; a lot of the material lost from the gesture of sweeping itself. As the broom moves across the floor, I'm reminded of a visit to Ryōan-ji in Kyoto, Japan and its kare-sansui dry landscape. Kare-sansui is a practice of assembling large rocks in a garden and spreading washed river rocks at their base, which in turn, are then raked into linear patterns. The garden then resembles an archipelago of islands in a flowing ocean and provides a framework for meditation. Here, on the corner of Orleans and Wilkins Streets, I was assembling my own temporal island of dust and dirt in the ocean of Detroit (Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 8
orleans & wilkins
floor sweep [for
régis] 2017 -
process





Figure 9
orleans & wilkins
floor sweep [for
régis] 2017



Figure 10
orleans & wilkins
floor sweep [for
régis] 2017 - detail

circle work [for gabriel] 2017

There was a great burn out on Orleans Street (Figure 11), and I was reminded of many practitioners' work including Michael Heizer, Ben Morieson and Gabriel Orozco. It also reminded me of kare-sansui and the repetitive raking of stones; an external gesture that could be reflected internally.

I begin to ride my bicycle again through the building, this time navigating into areas filthy with dust and dirt. I glance down to the floor and can see quite clearly the marks being left by the tyres of the bike. To say the building was porous was an understatement, and I tried riding through some of the puddles and pools of water left

over from a storm a few days earlier. The bicycle's tyre marks extend more clearly through the combination of dust and water.



Figure 11
Burn out on
Orleans Street,
Detroit

There's a really wonderful pool of water on the east side of the building and light is streaming in through the blackened steel-framed, unfinished windows. I ride my bike towards it, circumnavigate it a couple of times and edge closer and closer to the pool. I begin to ride through the pool, continuing on a circumference that repetitively enters in and out of the now murky body of water. I ride in a circle for two hours defining a boundary; drawing an internal, emerging and imagined island, whilst also drawing a circular line that marks time (Figure 12).



Figure 12
*circle work [for
gabriel] 2017*

the white house [for lara] 2017

There existed a house close to the Back Forty, a parcel of land that Graem and Faina (the Popp's Packing directors) had cultivated into a large green corridor with studios and a community garden (Figure 13). The 'white house', as it was known, was a three-story weatherboard house and available via the Detroit Land Bank to purchase for US\$1000. At this time in Detroit, the minimum wage was US\$8, and I started to think through a temporal intervention that made relations with this monetary amount and how many hours it would take someone to earn enough money at minimum wage to buy the house. Working eight hours a day, I would need to work for nearly sixteen days to buy the house - I intervened for two days, which equated to one eighth the time needed to earn enough money to buy the house.



Figure 13
The Back Forty
with the white
house in the
background
(Image courtesy
of Popp's Packing)



Figure 14
Inside the white
house

I had been shown inside the white house a couple of times, taken aback by its potential for becoming an incredible residential space (Figure 14). The house was pokey, unnecessary partitioned walls disrupting potential sight lines through its interior. I felt that by opening up some of the interior space, there would be a heightening of the house's potential.



Figure 15
the white house
[for lara] 2017



Figure 16
the white house
[for lara] 2017 -
detail

I gravitated to the ground floor due to its beautiful stained and marked timber and lino tiled floors, its many windows on the east and west facades, and that this was the floor that many at Popp's had talked about being extended out over the new kare-sansui garden in the Back Forty. I removed two of the interior walls, each made

from horse hair plaster, timber lathe, and pine stud frames, sweeping the dust and plaster residues from this process into a large pile into the central room, assembling another island in the ocean of Detroit (Figures 15 and 16).

hamtramck proposition [mulberry flag for mindy] 2017

I had been overwhelmed during my time at the residency with the quantity of flags that were flown from houses and buildings throughout Hamtramck and Detroit. Due to Hamtramck's diverse cultural history, many houses had two flags flying; one of their associated cultural background, the other, the stars and stripes. However, over the period of July 4th and the subsequent independence celebrations, it seemed that every flagpole I saw had raised an American flag, signifying a collective nationalistic pride.

I had met Mindy, a Hamtramck resident who lived on the same street as the Popp's Packing studios and who had Polish and American flags flying from her front veranda. She spoke generously about her rich Polish heritage over numerous cups of coffee. It was interesting that in the context of the 2017 global political climate, and especially in the USA, citizens so strongly associated themselves with ancestral immigration and that it still meant so much now. I wondered why Hamtramck, as this separate city within Detroit, hadn't positioned itself with a unifying symbol. I did find reference to a Hamtramck flag online (Flags of the World (FOTW), n.d.), however, not once did I ever see this flag being flown.

I asked Mindy if it would be possible to take down her Polish flag temporarily and raise one that I would make. We talked this through and I pitched that the flag would be assembled in similar ways to which I had been staining canvases. The mulberry was an obvious material choice to stain the flag with as everyone at this time of the year was eating mulberries, making mulberry pie, making mulberry wine, and swapping recipes and tips for maintaining their mulberry bushes.

There had been some recent thunderstorms with lots of rain, and I thought this might be an interesting context for the mulberry flag to be raised at Mindy's as the rain would perhaps wash out a lot of the mulberry juice over a period of time. The weather report insisted that there was going to be a series of large thunderstorms over the following twelve hours, so I decided to make two flags, one to be installed at Mindy's, the other made to see the visual difference in the two flags after the rain storms (Figure 17).

The weather report kept updating with more thunderstorms.

Initially, the flag was going to be installed for one night but ended up at Mindy's for forty-eight hours which was enough time to capture three large Summer storms, the powerful rain almost drained the mulberry juice entirely from the flag. By assembling the flag within, and subsequently being transformed by, the force of these storms, it highlighted the notion of interiority as a temporal field of interiors and duration as immersion in time as flow.



Figure 17
*hamtramck
proposition
[mulberry flag for
mindy] 2017*

indeterminate duration [for popps] 2017

In mid-July, the three artists in residence - myself, Juliette Pépin (Paris) and John Dante Bianchi (New York) – held an open studio and exhibition across our studio spaces and the two Popps Packing galleries. I assembled a collection of photographs, twenty-four stains on canvas, twenty-eight painted timber markers of time, and the two mulberry flags (Figure 18). I had kept the charcoal residue from the some of the initial works and had also kept a burnt piece of timber that I had used to rub onto the first five small canvases. I found a sieve from the studio kitchen which I used to make a small pile of charcoal residue, and in response to this, the burnt piece of timber was placed to its side (Figure 19).

This collection of work and final gesture highlights the many different temporal fields of interiors in operation during the residency; the responsive field within myself, the field of the studio at Popps Packing, the field (island) of Hamtramck, and the field (ocean) of greater Detroit. As Attiwill (2017) notes: “The works produced during the residency convey an affective quality of immersion in conditions of experience and temporality; in the force of duration.”



Figure 18
*indeterminate
duration [for
pops]* 2017



Figure 19
*indeterminate
duration [for
pops]* 2017

The month-long residency in Hamtramck operated across multiple fields, becoming multiple interiors, and notions that interiority is a temporal field (ocean) of interiors. The residency was, and my practice is, one of openness and responsiveness, where the indeterminate is celebrated through the foregrounding of duration; immersion in time as flow. The temporal, material and immaterial are considered as a dynamic and confluence of forces; assembled in time, materialising immateriality. Situations are encountered and responded to through a variety of techniques, highlighting the temporal aspects of interiorities as a result of mark making, marking

time, making time, and time making. By foregrounding duration in interior practice, it is a practising *in time*, then making relations with space, place and site.

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