

Objects Wrapped in Dreams Wrapped in Objects

By

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Abstract

An exploration of dreams is a recurring source of inspiration for my practice. Coupled with observations from lived, waking experience, dreams offer another layer and resource for making art. Inspired by my dreams the balloon is used as a material to explore the entanglement between waking life and the dream, between multifarious vantage points within the reality of everyday experience. I address some of the history of weather balloon as a scientific object and contemporary artists that use this artifact in their own art practices. The dream is embraced as an artist tool as is the cell phone. Aspects of contemporary thinking on objects informs the processed based research namely object-oriented ontology and vibrant matter. Some understanding of how relational aspects are privileged in vibrant matter start to emerge. Throughout this thesis I explore material practices in relation to new technology namely the weather balloon and the smartphone. In addition to philosophical ideas on objects, I investigate this through theoretical constructs on improvisation to develop bridging strategies to explain how the body reacts and responds to the beautiful agency and power of objects.

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Dedication

For Owl.

And the little baby that went to sleep in the woods, I hope to see you soon not just in my dreams, but running, laughing, and yelling at the top of your lungs, tethered to your own balloon.

Dream Logs

Throughout this essay each section begins with a dream log. This work is centred around the idea and experience of dreams. These excerpts are taken from the dream space, an ethereal, hypnagogic realm that takes place in the transitional state from wakefulness to sleep, when I was in a constant delirium with a newborn baby, sleeping intermittently, in hour-to-hour chunks. These logs describe a correspondence between realms, motivated by events, associative memories,¹ sequences and images from the two years of my Master's degree when I was pregnant with my first and second child. In this way dream logs, however fantastical or mundane, are central to this thesis.

In *Einstein's Dreams*, physicist and writer Alan Lightman portrays many different aspects of time. He refers to time as being sticky, and people becoming stuck in routines or in moments in their lives. These dream logs are moments of unstuck time, bringing magical potential and calmness to unconscious moments. In one such dream, a white oversized orb, caught in a delicate grip in my hands is the inspiration and central motivation for my thesis research, informing my thoughts and practice of art making.

Project Logs

As each section begins with a dream log, they conclude with a project log. This second component represents material investigations and bodily improvisations with the weather balloon, the built environment and landscapes. These visual excerpts are taken from video stills, digital photographs and process documentation. Like the dream logs, these project logs become a correspondence between realms, motivated by events, sequences and spacial awareness. In this way project logs map the results of each investigation and are central to this inquiry.

In writer's Carole Gray and Julian Malin's *Visualizing Research*, they define the role of practice-based research through action, experimentation and reflection as providing the potential for discovering new methods. They refer to sketchbooks as offering a context to record and store visual ideas, data and information. These project logs provide a digital sketchbook or laboratory of sorts, capturing aspects of my artistic practice. The logs relate to one another; one is a physical representation and the other is a conceptual representation of my artistic practice.

¹ In the 1800's British psychologist David Hartley suggested that dreaming alters the strength of associative memories (Aserinsky, Kleitman 273–74). Neuropsychologist Wendy A. Suzuki describes associative memory “as the ability to learn and remember the relationship between unrelated items such as the name of someone we have just met or the aroma of a particular perfume” (Suzuki 175-79). In the past 50 years the discovery of REM and NREM (non-rem) studies led to the hypothesis that “sleep creates cognitive plasticity, and actively participates in the process of memory development” (Walker, Matthew and Stickgold 140-142).

DREAM LOG #1 - THE ORB

It is 2 a.m. and I have awoken to Owl's cries for milk. I roll over and feed her. As I finally fall back into sleep, I remember the dream I was just transported from. I saw a white orb suspended above my eyes. I couldn't grab hold of the object floating above me. I could only stare at it. That's when I noticed a cord attached to my arm, tethered to the orb. It was bigger than me, bigger than my hands, gliding above me, spinning in the wind and filling me with instant smiles.

INTRODUCTION

“There is an art, or rather a knack to flying. The knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss.” (Adams 363)

In the spirit of throwing oneself across distance, the plunge here is in the act of navigating dreams. The leap begins with the image of a white orb, tied to my hand, floating upwards, lifting me up into the unconscious pull of the dreamworld. Flying begins with a smile, a sequence of spins, giggles and then an adrenaline rush of weightlessness.

This thesis essay describes a material practice that draws from academic and non academic sources, dreams, contemporary art, philosophy, psychology, storytelling, and modern dance. The dream logs and production logs are manifestations of process. The writing attempts to bridge the unconscious dream space with reality, negotiating the cracks, and fissures between time and space, between layers of conscious and unconscious movements, between waking reality and the dream space. I work with weather balloons to investigate a relationship to the dream space and the poetic potential of this metaphorical object to investigate how an allegedly scientific object moves in spaces that are non-cartesian, autobiographical and open to poetic interpretation.

The weather balloon has been used in other art works such as Swiss artist Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York*. Tinguely used weather balloons as a means to negotiate urban space. In *Homage to New York*, 1960, his self-destructing sculpture was made of a weather balloon, a horn, fifty bicycle wheels, motors, and chemicals-that emitted horrible smells and smoke (The American Society of Cinematographers website). Clearly this technological object can evoke a range of artistic responses.

I am fascinated with technologies like the iPhone that can be adapted as an artist tool and material, with which to record improvisations and sound elements that might be incorporated into future installations. How do my senses change and evolve in their ongoing relations with these objects? By taking up the weather balloon in my practice, it allows for the crossing of distances, gliding through landscapes and dimensions both imagined and real, led by my body in a dance of intuition and reflection, the balloon becomes a figure of weightlessness. The potential for poetic expression is limitless.

The methodology is informed by Object-Oriented Ontology and by the works of contemporary media artists Ana Rewakowicz and Kelly Nipper who are at the forefront of thinking about material practices in relation to new technology and inflatables. Navigating relationships has been a common theme in other art works such as in Turkish artists Heather and Ivan Morison's *Knives are Mothers*. They used sculptural objects, installation, photographs, and a narrated audio piece between an older woman and a girl as a means to focus on how individuals move beyond moments of adversity (SATmag website). Objects and

the fluidity of the dream space are taken up in my work, and mirrored through the study of carrying weather balloons across distance in repetitive tasks like wandering, crawling, falling, and crouching. The tacit motif of the mother and child relationship is taken up through the imagery of the white orb and the weather balloon. Through these actions the balloon exists independently and has its own desire, quietly alluding to the complexities of the maternal relationship.²

I have considered movement with lively objects through a variety of dance traditions such as contact dance improvisation, somatic practice, martial arts, butoh, and collective research practice.³ Through these styles and everyday tasks and movements, my artwork comes into form. In general I focus on improvisations that generate physical sensation throughout my body and mind. In turn, movement evokes memories, and lives in the body. I have been naturally drawn to somatic movement principles that emphasize personal and physical experience (internal proprioception), which in turn provide foundational techniques to create new works (Batson 1-2).

² The complexities of the maternal relationship in my life and work are implicit in the day to day negotiations of nurturing, sustenance and childcare. As a result I do not explicitly take up feminist issues in this paper whether in the subject matter of the thesis project or the theoretical frameworks from which I draw. But feminist art history and practices are very alive in my process, influences and the ways in which I represent my own body in the work.

³ Since 2007, I have been investigating movement, somatic practices and collective researching with Dance Troupe Practice (DTP), a movement-based performance collective in Vancouver. DTP has been foundational for my movement practice because of the unique interdisciplinary output of works that combine dance, video and installation. Committed to engaging in embodiment practices and movement inquiries, DTP explore's the border zones between dance and life. Members are encouraged to bring their individual experiences and perspectives to the dance space to find expression. The focus is on the quality and the intention of the movements.

METHOD: THE DREAM AS ARTISTIC TOOL

The dream as an artistic tool has informed many artists including Hieronymous Bosch, Henry Fuseli, Odilon Redon, Frida Kahlo, Salvador Dali and Man Ray to name but a few. French poet, and avid art collector André Breton in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, describes the importance of dreams: “I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams.... [We are] above all the plaything of [our] memory.”⁴ Unconscious productions have also served as inspiration to writers such as Samuel Coleridge (*The Kubla Khan*, 1816) and Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*, 1818). These two works of literature have been particularly inspirational to my own formative imagination. Dreams have also been an inspiration for contemporary cinema. Two films that have inspired my own oneiric investigations are the Russian film *The Mirror* by Andrei Tarkosky and Michel Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The variety of these artistic forms and genres demonstrate the elastic potential of the dream to generate innovative aesthetic fragments and ethereal visual landscapes.

The dream is a space of altered consciousness filled with images, wishes, sounds, and vivid sensations. Made up of impressions from the physical world, these are translated and interpreted in the unconscious realm. Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, describes dreams as representations of unconscious desires, motivations, thoughts or wish-fulfillments, suggesting that these desires find their way into our awareness. While there are many important and valid critiques of Freud’s work, his writing continues to be an important influence on the cultural understanding of dreams and by extension my artistic process. Indeed a fuller discourse on dreams has allowed for my own immersion into their potential influence on producing innovative environments.⁵ My investigations into dream research offers an understanding of the basic components of dreams which highlight their influence as a vital, sustaining resource that deepens the connection between my work and my life. Coupled with observations from waking experience, dreams provide another layer and method for making art. I keep a log of lucid dreams, visions and events and interpret these remnants into art works. The weather balloon first appeared in a dream and struck me as a powerful symbol. I have since been working with weather

⁴ In his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Andre Breton outlines the importance of dreams among other examples as inspirations for Surrealism and daily life practices. Breton also discusses an encounter with the hypnagogic state (Breton 7-8).

⁵ The most notable dream theories include: psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s *wish fulfilment*, psychiatrist J. Allan Hobson’s activation-synthesis (accidental side-effect of random neural impulses), psychiatrist Jie Zhang’s *continual-activation* (encoding short-term memories into long-term storage), neurologists Francis Crick and Graeme Mitchison’s *reverse learning* (garbage collection), psychiatrist Robert Strickgold’s *consolidation* (we dream to remember), anthropologist Ionnanis Tsoukalas’ *tonic immobility* (evolutionary outgrowth of the playing dead defence mechanism), philosopher Antti Revoniusuo’s *threat stimulation* (dreams simulate threatening events, and to rehearse threat perception/ avoidance), Deirdre Barrett’s *problem solving*, (dreams function as a theatre to solve problems), psychologist Mark Blechner’s Oneiric Darwinism (dreams function as thought mutations), and finally psychiatrist Ernest Hartmann’s *contemporary theory of dreams* (processing painful emotions with symbolic associations).

balloons as a means to transcend and bridge realms, to further investigate a relationship to the dream space. Inspired by my dreams the balloon is a metaphor for the entanglement between waking life and the dream, between multifarious vantage points within the reality of everyday experience.

Both Freud and his former student Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung offer some interesting strategies for using dreams to inform art making. No matter how irrational, dreams need to be interpreted because their manifest content is not the same as their hidden or latent content. Freud believed that the *manifest content* is the subject-matter of a dream (the elements of the dream that we remember upon awakening), while the *latent content* is the underlying meaning of these symbols or images. Condensation and displacement are systems of transformation that I have used for material investigations with weather balloons. Condensation is when multiple dream thoughts are combined into a single element in a manifest dream. According to Jung, displacement is where the dreamer represses an urge, and then redirects that urge to another person or object. These systems of transformation are especially relevant for how processes such as condensation and displacement can be directed through my material investigations with weather balloons. They provide a powerful tool for exploring the symbolic potential of objects.

The scientific study of why and how we dream is called oneirology. The term was first coined by French scientist Marquis d'Hervey de Saint Denys in 1853.⁶ Oneirology research overlaps with neurology and varies from quantifying dreams, analyzing brain waves, and studying the effects of drugs and neurotransmitters on dreaming or sleeping. One of the most interesting areas of dream research is on the lucid state. Unlike the conventional understanding of sleep states and brain activity, lucid dreams are a specific category of dreams whereby the dreamer is able to manipulate their imaginary experiences in the dream environment (Kahan and LaBerge 246–264). Lucid dreaming produces an increased amount of brain activity in the parietal lobe region (responsible for integrating sensory information from various parts of the body, number counting, and object manipulation), making lucid dreaming a conscious process (Holzinger, LaBerge, and Levitan 88–95). In lucid dreaming the dreamer realizes that a dream is a dream. Psychophysiologist Stephen LaBerge in his *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, describes a lucid dreaming technique called *Dream Spinning*:

⁶ Hervey de Saint Denys began recording his dreams on a daily basis from the age of 13 and collected 22 notebooks containing dreams and drawings of 946 nights. In his *Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger; observations pratiques*, he describes lucid dreaming and provides a set of techniques to control dreams. In the technique *solidarite rememorative*, he conditions his mind to re-experience and consciously control dreams. He also created the terms *abstraction* and *superimposition* that today are now called *displacement* and *condensation* (Ellenberger 308). I include this because D'Hervey understood that there is a plasticity to the mind, and through studying his own dreams he could see overlaps and patterns in consciousness. Interestingly, D'Hervey also “frequently drew comparisons between dream-consciousness and dreaming and the new optical instruments and technologies of his time - particularly the camera, the photograph and the magic-lantern” (Marcus 54).

As soon as the visual imagery of your lucid dream begins to fade, quickly, before the feel of your dream body evaporates, stretch out your arms and spin like a top (with your dream body, of course). It doesn't matter whether you pirouette, or spin like a top, dervish, child or bottle, as long as you vividly feel your dream body in motion. This is not the same as imagining you are spinning: for the technique to work, you must feel the vivid sensation of spinning. (LaBerge 118)

LaBerge became adept at *Dream Spinning*: His activities were “based on the idea of loading the perceptual system so it cannot change its focus from the dream world to the waking world” (LaBerge 120).

Lucid dreaming has been part of my practice for over twenty years. I believe that dreams can be harnessed for artistic purposes. By actively and perceptually engaging with the dream world, I am less likely to transition to the waking state and therefore more successful at harvesting images, sounds and impressions. In particular, I have found dream spinning and concentrating on the sounds and rhythms of breathing to be especially effective in producing lucid dreams. Intrigued by things I see and hear in the dynamic and generative world of dreams, I work with dreams and embodied memories⁷ through material investigations (see Fig. 1 and 2). By establishing a system of control, whereby I recognize that I am dreaming, prolong my experience, awake and then document the process, to revisit the dream from the lucid state. English author Mary Arnold-Forster in her *Studies in Dreams*, also describes dream control and the practice of directed dreaming (known as lucid dreaming):

Nightmares and dreams of fear exist, other ugly and evil imaginings may also be hidden away out of sight, and all these conceptions, side by side with our uncounted half-forgotten memories of fair and happy things, are set free when the will that controls them is wholly or partially suspended at night. But I believe that not only are these sinister visions and interpretations exaggerated, but I shall also hope to show that, in sleep, we are not, or need never be, left at their mercy, because we can if we choose exercise a real and effective control over the nature of our dreams. (Arnold-Forster 39)

Arnold-Forster became adept at directed dreaming, as noted by her biographer: “Like many other lucid dreamers, she taught herself to fly and thus to enter, at will, all of the rooms of her house; she particularly enjoyed flying down her stairs” (Hobson 41). The image of buoyancy is a recurring motif in my work. Like

⁷ Psychoanalyst Robert Bosnak in his *Embodiment: Creative Imagination in Medicine, Art and Travel*, describes the process whereby we can re-enter a dream in the hypnagogic state using a creative technique called *Embodied Imagination* (Boznak 38-40). This contemporary technique is used by artists, and in my own practice to understand dream images and material. Boznak's technique offers the dreamer guidelines on how to re-experience and anchor the dream in the body simultaneously.

Arnold-Forster, I am inspired by the scientific study of dreams, and the potential to discover meaning and inspiration from the unconscious as a research space.

PROJECT LOG #1 - THE ORB

Description: Investigations with 4' weather balloon.

Location: Mitchell Press studios.

Objects: weather balloon, iPhone camera.

Technique: Moments of stillness and movement between rooms using body to push and direct balloon around the space.



Fig. 1. Prophecy Sun, 2013. *Studio, (Mitchell Press Building)*. Video Still and Photograph.



Fig. 2. Prophecy Sun, 2013. *Studio, (Mitchell Press Building)*. Digital Photographs.

DREAM LOG #2 - FLIGHT

It is 5 a.m. and I have awoken to the sound of a great storm outside my window. As I fall back asleep, I dream of weather balloons. Big and white, they fill the turbulent sky with life, resembling a sac from inside the womb. Untethered, they float up courageously, like vulnerable bodies with breathing organs and tissues splayed for the world to see. Blown up to their full capacity, they transform and glide upwards like mighty, graceful explorers, fearlessly circumnavigating the continent.

METHOD: WEATHER BALLOONS AS ART MATERIAL

Weather balloons are alive, independent and responsive to their environment. Not only a technology for scientific mapping and exploration, they have been used by others to carry tools, bodies, objects, chairs, and people. For example in 1982, Lawrence Walters (Larry Lawnchair) made a homemade airship out of a chair and 45 helium-filled weather balloons that took flight over the Los Angeles skyline (The Official Site of The Lawn Chair Pilot website), (see Fig. 3). The weather balloon is a translucent and luminous instrument that can also be an artistic object that has agency, buoyancy and liveliness. Like the iPhone (as I discuss below), this airborne machine can be adapted to unconventional actions where its materiality, transportability and mutable form can be transformed into a powerful art material. For example in addition to having a strong physical presence it also makes sounds and vibrates in response to atmospheric conditions. Further, its heft and fragility offer endless expressive potential.

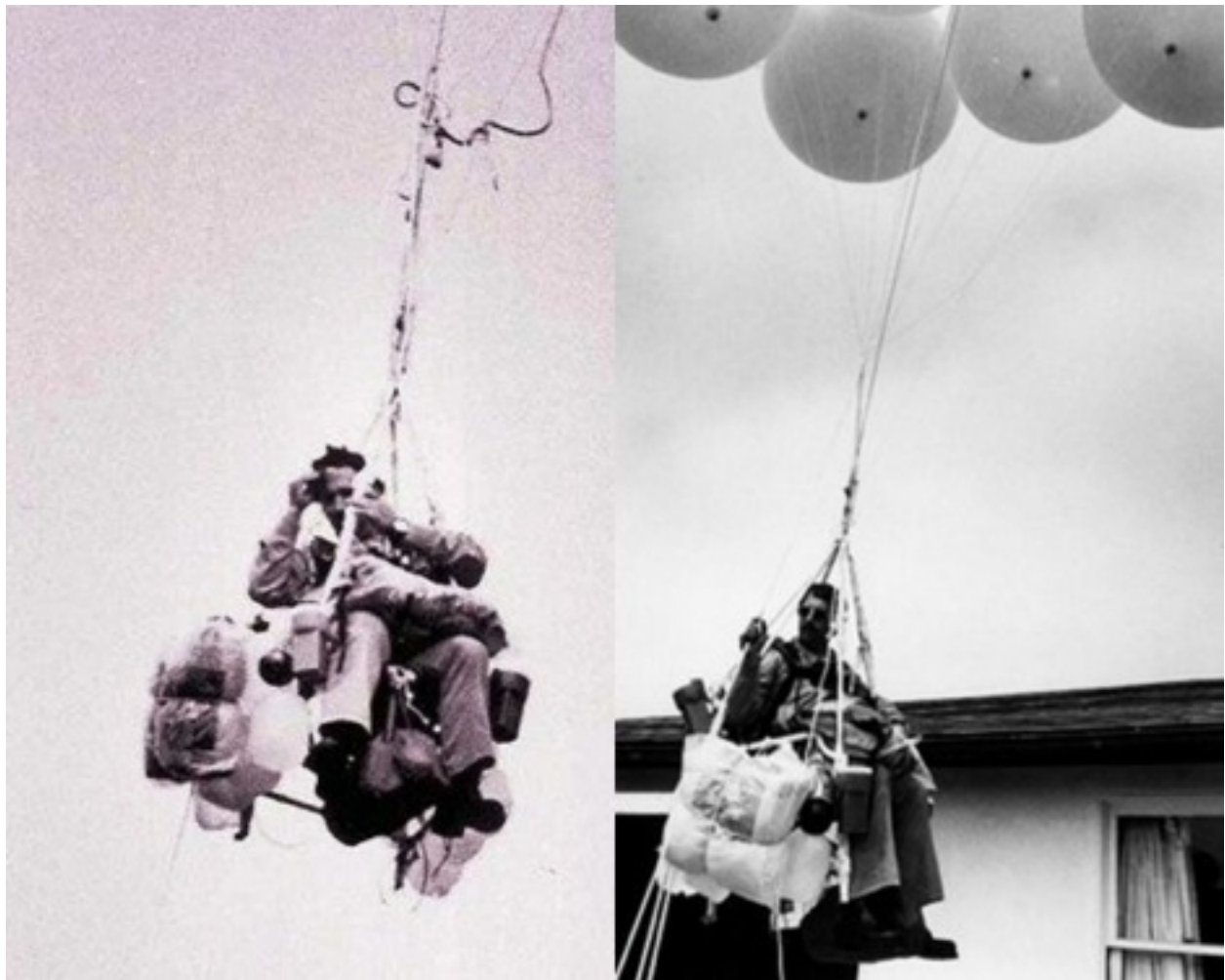


Fig. 3. Lawrence Walters, 1982. *The Lawn Chair Pilot*. Digital Photograph. Used by permission of Mark Barry.

Weather balloons are made out of latex or synthetic rubber (neoprene) and are filled with helium or hydrogen.⁸ They are also called *sounding balloons* because they take acoustic impressions of the atmosphere. They were first used in the skies to obtain wind data. In 1896, French meteorologist Léon Teisserenc de Bort launched hundreds of them from his observatory in France, leading to the discovery of the boundary of Earth's atmosphere, the stratosphere and the troposphere (the lowest layer) (Fonton 1-3). The experimental nature of Teisserenc de Bort's work inspires my own improvisations and iterations with the weather balloon.



Fig. 4. Weather balloon, 1958. (United States Navy - Weather Bureau Topics) Digital Photograph. Public domain copyright.

⁸ I use a shop-vac to fill my balloons with regular air.

I also am inspired by the larger history of this technology. Currently, weather balloons are launched around the world to predict and track weather patterns. About 800 locations around the globe do routine releases, twice daily (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website). In the last 30 years these balloons have also been used for amateur scientific experiments, aerial photography, atmospheric measurements, and filming space flight (Curley 1-20). Weather balloons can be tracked by radar, radio direction finding, or navigation systems (such as the satellite-based Global Positioning System, GPS) or by theodolites, instruments that measure angles in the vertical and horizontal planes of the atmosphere (Morlock 10-50). The invention of the weather balloon inaugurated the age of remote sensing, providing us with the ability to collect information from previously unattainable sources. Perhaps it is not surprising that Freud and his contemporaries' dream investigations were happening at the same time and echo the ways in which the dream like the uncharted skies were part of late nineteenth century scientific landscape. Weather balloons also gave us the freedom to travel the sky and explore the atmospheric composition farther away from the earth's influence. Up high, these balloons traverse unknown territories, producing advanced atmospheric research data for astronomers and cosmologists alike (Cheng, Chio-Zong et al. 166-166).

The weather balloon also opened up possibilities to redefine the kinesphere or our understanding of what we acknowledge as our personal space (see Fig. 5). Hungarian dance theorist Rudolf Laban in his *Laban Movement Analysis* (LMA) principles, describes kinesphere as personal reach space (see Fig. 5). He suggests that every movement is controlled and directed by sub-conscious states which are either direct or open, obscure or obfuscated or conflicted; and conversely, that movement itself can evoke a desired emotion (Bartenieff 89-93).⁹ In my research the weather balloon defies existing trace forms made by the body, changing shape and kinesphere with each action. This wonderful object alters our perceptions of where we go both physically in our bodies and conceptually in our imaginations. The balloon balanced in my hands, floats between realms, offering a dance between layers of conscious and unconscious movements.

⁹ He also describes movement as trace forms in space, and the dynamic interrelationships created by the body and spatial points as spatial tensions. He created geometric forms to show the dimensions and planes as they related to a body's centre of gravity (LMA Principles Website).



Fig. 5. Rudolf Laban's *Icosahedron*. Archival Photograph. LMA Website.

DREAM LOG #3 - OBJECTS WRAPPED IN OBJECTS

It is 6 a.m. and I have awoken to the sound of Owl coughing. I hold her close and wrap the blanket around her body, and around my shoulders. She kicks them off. I wrap the blanket again over her, and my shoulders. She kicks them off. I wrap the blanket again over her, and my shoulders. She kicks them off. Again, I wrap the blanket over her, and my shoulders. Eventually she nods off and I close my eyes. As I fall back asleep, I dream of hovering over the bed and looking down from above at the three of us. We are a complex set of relations; one coughs, one melds to the wall and one looks upwards. Wrapped in blankets, our three bodies become one, swaddled up in a object that resembles a cocoon-like universe.

OBJECTS WRAPPED IN OBJECTS WRAPPED IN OBJECTS

In dreams, objects often assume unusual proportions. According to dream analyst David Lohff in *The Dream Dictionary*, certain objects and situations are given emotional importance. For example, the emotional dimensions of experiences alter how objects are recognized and received in our unconscious perceptions. Objects enter my work from the dream and then take on further importance in the waking state through my improvised exploration of their material and symbolic potential.

Through this thesis project I have become acquainted with new and diverse discourses around objects. I have considered objects through a variety of philosophical traditions such as Object-Oriented Ontology, Speculative Realism, Vital Materialism and Vibrant Matter. I am excited by their powerful implications for artistic practice. In Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), objects are granted agency whereas in New Materialism the focus is more on non-human forms such as animals and other lively organisms. Speculative Reason addresses the Metaphysical or a reality beyond what is perceived by our senses. At their core, these lines of thought reject the privileging of human existence over objects, allowing things to exist independently of human perception, needs and desires.

I will spend some time on Object-Oriented Ontology as it was my initial foray into this area of research, and later I will make some distinctions between the various “schools” or approaches. Object-Oriented Ontology was first articulated by philosopher Graham Harman, the idea radically repositions the relationship between objects and humans, from a relationship of power to one of codependence, coexistence and ontological equality. Harman in his *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, describes substances as being everywhere:

We have a universe made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects. The reason we call these objects "substances" is not because they are ultimate or indestructible, but simply because none of them can be identified with any (or even all) of their relations with other entities. None of them is a pristine kernel of substantial unity unspoiled by interior parts. We never reach some final layer of tiny components that explains everything else, but enter instead into an indefinite regress of parts and wholes. (Harman, 2011, 85)

I see much poetic potential in the phrase “objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects” and wonder about its implications within an artistic rendering of parts and wholes, dreams and spaces, objects and subjects. Harman’s complex set of relations of objects are echoed both in my dreams and my own mediated explorations of infinite regress, or worlds within worlds. For example the air is wrapped by the balloon in itself is wrapped by me, wrapped by the room, wrapped by the building, wrapped by the city, wrapped by the continent, wrapped by the earth. Sound has the ability to be a physical component; wrapped in layers upon layers, wrapped by air, wrapped in itself by the balloon, wrapped by me, wrapped

by the room, wrapped by city. I see much potential in the physical and the conceptual layering of objects, and these ideas influence my artistic practice. Harman describes qualities of sensual objects and how each of us experiences objects in different ways (Harman, 2012, 31-34, 241-242). This has a lot of potential implications for discussing objects in art. For example I enjoy how the weather balloon is an object wrapped in dreams wrapped in an object. By this I mean it can be scientific, sensual, technological, metaphorical and so on.

In stark contrast to Freudian analysis and the concepts of condensation and displacement, Object-Oriented Ontology decentres the human from a privileged vantage point in the world of meaning (Morton, 2009, 16-17). The thinking that it generates challenges us to think differently about materiality. Reading Philosopher Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, I am inspired to approach objects and by extension art in new ways where new relations emerge between me and the material objects.

In *Vibrant Matter*, political theorist Jane Bennett frames objects as lively and vibrant, possessing agency. Sometimes referred to as Neo-vitalism, Bennett's thought highlights the active role of non-human materials in public life, acknowledging that objects exist in the world after we project and impose our will on things. She suggests that our emotions can assist us in viewing objects differently and our perception of objects changes with the use of our different senses. My study of weather balloons has been informed by my emotional and sensual engagement with this object specifically through a nurturing and material investment with its form. For example, in one video iteration of the weather balloon I tend to the delicate and fragile nature of its thin skin as it is bounced against concrete walls.

At this point in the research my work is more aligned with Bennett especially how she considers relationally and materialism. In *Systems and things: a response to Graham Harman and Timothy Morton*, Bennett describes the distinctions between objects and relations, discrete entities and systems. She suggests that we live in a populated world surrounded by diverse, lively bodies:

Earthly bodies, of various but always finite durations, affect and are affected by one another. And they form noisy systems or temporary working assemblages which are, as much as any individuated thing, loci of affection and allure. These...systems enact real change. They give rise to new configurations, individuations, patterns of leanings, and affections. (Bennett, 2012, 231)

What I take from the vibrancy of objects and their ontology is a speculative relation that reflects both the dream and these emergent philosophical ideas.¹⁰ Bennett considers her own perspective on the balances between system and *thing*, and suggests that these systems offer knowledge, and new configurations, without changing the trajectory of any epiphenomenal body to its own relations (Bennett, 2012, 231-232). I see much potential in earthly bodies affecting one another. My work explores how to be in relation with objects in a way that does not privilege a human centric point of view. In my investigations with various sized balloons, I reveal this vibrancy of subject and object by appearing sometimes as the subject, and sometimes as the object. I move the balloon and it moves me when it presses against me and I feel its agency (see Fig. 6).

The relation of dreams and objects wrapped in objects is exemplified in *Time is Precious*, where I investigate physical and psychological struggles with the female body through interactions with various sized weather balloons.¹¹ The weather balloon, suggestive of a large floating mammary gland, white and full of milk, touchable but uncontrollable creates a performative framework for experimentations such as bouncing, holding, gliding and moving in and out of an elevator and gallery space (see Fig. 8). Each iteration inspired another.

¹⁰ Bennett describes taking up the word *thing* or *body* instead of *object* “to disrupt the political parsing that yields only active (American, manly) subjects and passive objects (Bennett, 2012, 231).” I do not explicitly take up the words *thing* or *body*, instead I use the word *object* throughout this paper whether in the subject matter of the thesis project or the theoretical frameworks from which I draw. Bennett’s ideas influence the ways in which I represent my own body in the work.

¹¹ When physically engaged, the relatively larger weather balloons feel more like a body in that it has weight, and holds space. This affects the improvised performance, allowing the balloon to take-on a kind of agency; through scale, the balloon becomes a ‘being’ at play within the dreamscape.

PROJECT LOG #2 - SPACE TIME: OBJECTS WRAPPED IN OBJECTS

Description: investigations with 8' weather balloon.

Location: Mitchell Press building.

Objects: weather balloon, iPhone camera, elevator.

Technique: Improvised movement using body to push and direct balloon around the space.

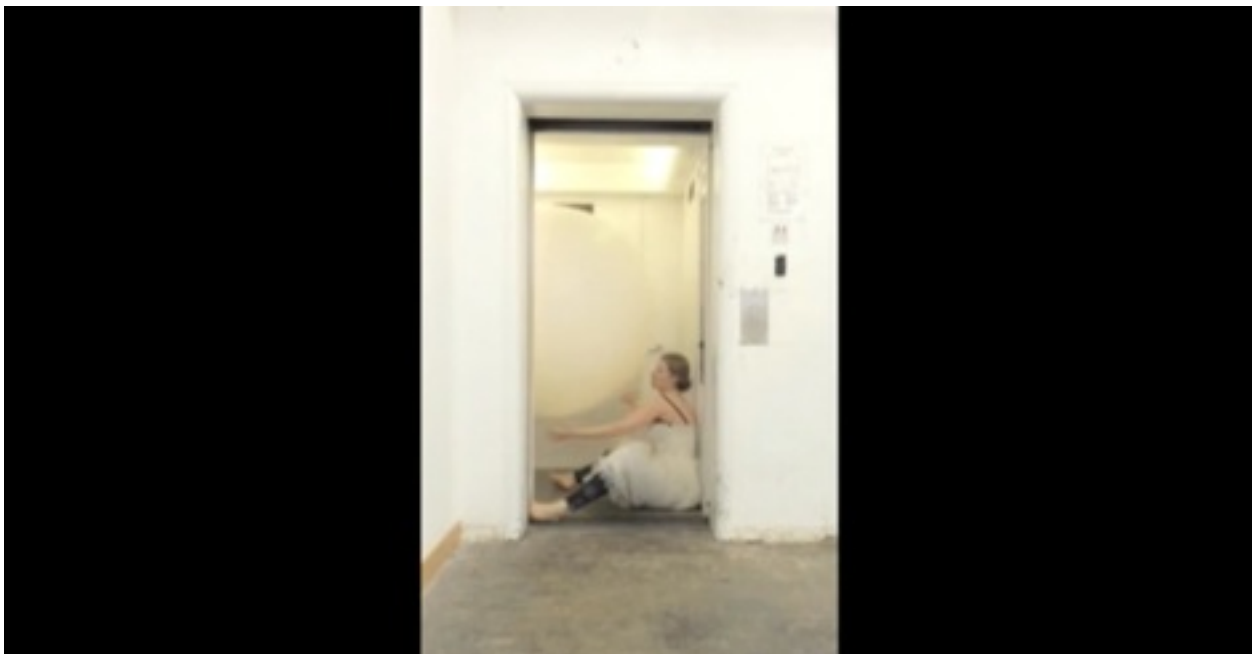


Fig. 6. Prophecy Sun, 2013. *Time is Precious*, (Mitchell Press Building). Video Stills.

DREAM LOG #4 - SENSING

It is 7 p.m. and I have awoken to sounds of the house creaking. I open then close my eyes. As I fall back asleep, I listen to the refrigerator hum, the cat door swings open and closed, the breathing rhythms from the two bodies laying next to me. In and out, in and out, the sequences calm and melodious. One tone is soft and velvety from the mouth to the pillow; the other deep, muffled and guttural in behind hair and draped hands.

METHOD: THE BODY, CHANCE, AND IMPROVISATION

An active engagement with objects is navigated through bodily movement, chance encounters and improvisation. In the performative elements in my work, the body plays a central role, drawing on dream moments and memories. As someone with dance training it is a means through which my artwork comes into form. Movement evokes memories, and lives in the body. Through bodily movement and chance brought about by improvisation I express emotion, memory and experience in a tangible form.

In the 1960s, dance icon Yvonne Rainer changed the face of dance in front of a camera, embodying stripped down choreography. Rainer is influential to my practice because of the ways she experiences and liberates the body and motion in front of a camera. Her work highlights the body more as the “source of an infinite variety of movements than as the purveyor of emotion or drama.”¹² Elements such as repetition, games, tasks, and patterning, eventually became standard features of contemporary dance. In her video performance of a choreographic score, *Trio A*, Rainer employed new strategies in her dance making. For example, she made all movement direct, functional, task driven, and devoid of stylization (see Fig. 7). *Trio A* inspires me to consider that space where the mind becomes just another muscle in the body, and the focus becomes the objective presence of the body as an object and its movement.

In *Stairwell: A Study*, a weather balloon was carried up and down an industrial staircase (see Fig. 8 and 9).¹³ In addition to a relational engagement with this object, I was inspired by Rainer’s choreography and task oriented process. *Stairwell: A Study*, is composed of simple task-like movements, random sequences and the repetitive gestures of carrying a weather balloon up and down a staircase. While I take inspiration from Rainer’s choreography of every day or repetitive movements, I am also mindful of the camera or in my case the iPhone as yet another object with which I am in relation. The fluidity of the dream space is mirrored in this study. The stairwell becomes a condensed space where the weather balloon object and my sensual movements bypass clear meaning. I use techniques and exercises that allow for new configurations, improvisations and chance encounters that embrace the fluid nature of the dream space.

¹² Yvonne Rainer’s work focused on liberating the performer, bringing their feelings and movement essence to the piece. Ultimately, the dancers eccentricities were appreciated, not discouraged (Carrie Lambert-Beatty 10-15).

¹³ Artist Francis Alÿs in *A line going out for a walk*, presents a line coming into “being” because of the movement of his body walking (Couchez 102-104). He also inspires me to consider what is mobility, and choreography, as his actions birth writing on the surface of the ground. I am also intrigued by his video piece, *Cuentos Patrióticos*, 1997 (black and white, sound). This piece showcases his choreographic interests working with a flock of sheep in circular patterns. He physically moves objects in repetitive tasks such as herding animals, pushing carts or walking with paint cans. I created movement sequences in *Echoes of Balance and Push* considering Alÿs everyday actions.



Fig. 7. Yvonne Rainer, 1978. *Trio A*, 10:30 minutes. Video Still of Performance.

PROJECT LOG #3 - SENSING AND RESPONDING

Description: investigation of 4' weather balloon in confined space.

Location: Mitchell Press stairwell.

Objects: weather balloon, iPhone camera, stairs.

Technique: movement between two landings using limbs to hold balloon off the ground.



Fig. 8. Prophecy Sun, 2013. *Stairwell*, (Mitchell Press Stairwell). Video Still.

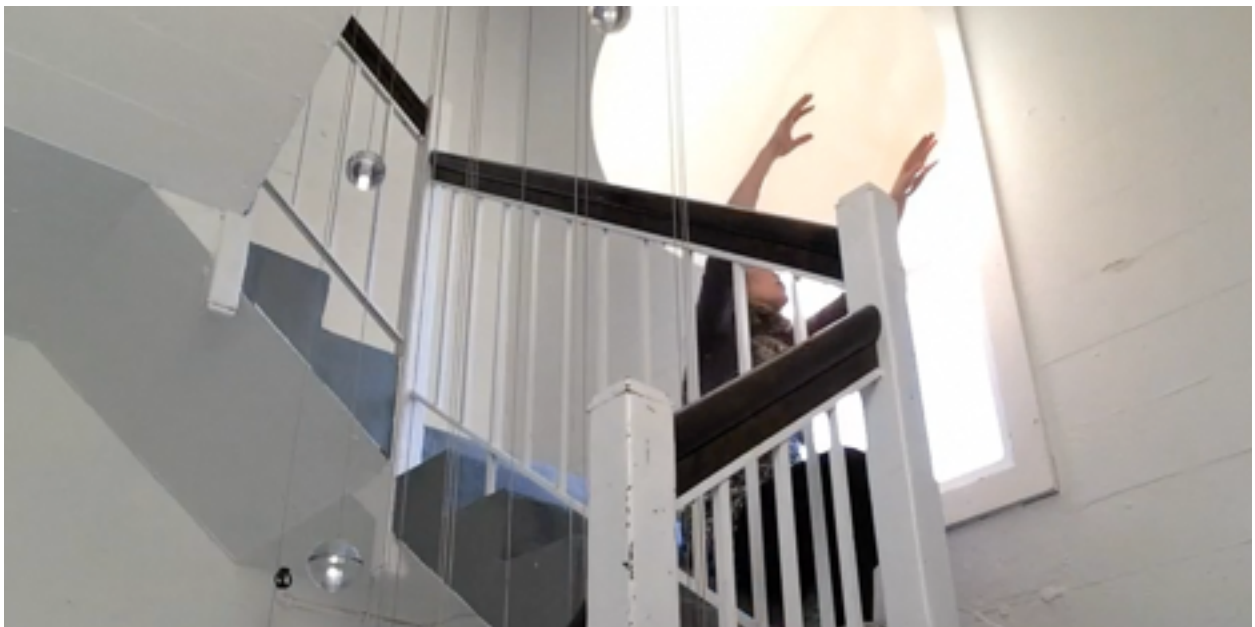


Fig. 9. Prophecy Sun, 2013. *Stairwell, (Mitchell Press Stairwell)*. Video Stills.

DREAM LOG #5 - SERENDIPITY

It is 7 p.m. and the house is almost quiet. As I fall asleep, the sounds of a radio, running water, a cat snoring under the bed and Owl banging pots and pans in the kitchen fill my senses. I immediately transport to a landscape filled with white mountains and an ice pond. In the distance a river falls upwards. I notice I am in the middle of a dance of sorts so I continue the actions of jumping, swinging, gliding across the pond in hopes of not falling and breaking through the surface.

METHOD: THE SMARTPHONE AS ARTISTIC TOOL

Objects are vibrant entities. In my practice the iPhone is a tool with which to record improvisations and sound elements that might be incorporated into future installations. This technology has an GPS that can record the latitude and longitude of all of the user's movements and coordinates. Its ability to communicate with cellphone towers and satellites makes it an object that can cross physical and spatial boundaries belying its disarmingly small size. Being small, it can go everywhere, which means its presence is expansive. As Timothy Morton writes in *Ecology Without Nature*, objects can exist across distance, being so massive that they refute time and space (Morton, 2009, 10-18). Here the concept of omnipresence, to be present everywhere, highlights the dream like potential of the artist tool as much as the content.

The smartphone's accelerometer senses directional acceleration which gives an indication of the speed, direction and quality of an object's trajectory. As the weather balloon explores the surface of the earth, attending to structures unseen, so too does the phone's camera and embedded sensors capture my bodily experiences and investigations. There is a liberating potential with current phone technology that operates beyond its populist communication applications and generates to my great pleasure speculative and chimeric imagery.

While in this current project I am not using the accelerometer or GPS, I do take advantage of the expansive nature of the smartphone, through its ability to immediately edit and upload content and its intrinsic affinity to serendipity. Like dreams improvisations can be hard to capture in the moment.¹⁴ The facility of using the iPhone with all its improvisational qualities aids in capturing spontaneous sounds, images and movements not dissimilar to the immediacy of waking up and recording a dream.

For these and other reasons, it is not surprising that artists take up these new consumer grade technologies for artistic production. Kat Sloma and Rodolfo Moraga are two contemporary artists that use iPhone technology as part of their art practice. Sloma exclusively shoots with a mobile and edits the photos she takes on an iPad, using her finger for the tactile interaction like drawing or painting. Moraga shoots music videos using the iPhone as a tool to keep current with camera trends and viewing angles. In fact the iPhone Film Festival has been showcasing new cinematic projects since 2010 demonstrating emergent platforms for a growing audience of users and consumers simultaneously. The rapid advancement of smartphone technology over the past five-years has enabled artists and filmmakers to

¹⁴ We forget almost all dreams soon after waking up. According to Ernest Hartmann, dreaming lies on a continuum with other forms of mental functioning. The act of dreaming is characterized by activity in the cerebral cortex. On one side of the cortex is dreaming and mind wandering, while focused thought resides on the other side. He suggests that with five movements our beautiful or bizarre dream is gone, unless it had emotional significance (Hartmann *Why Do Memories*).

capture seemingly ineffable gestures with a facility and immediacy that was not possible only a short time ago.

In my work, I use the iPhone to document actions, sounds and investigations in the moment to investigate the relationship between dream states, the body and objects. This technology is responsive to improvisation. It has manageable limits and parameters, allowing for solitary and self-reliant pre and post production.¹⁵ The video quality reflects the desired immediacy of the performance as well as evoking a dream like aesthetic through its “lo fi” properties. As I work with the captured imagery and sounds, I make editing choices that somehow mirror specific dream scenarios and impressions transforming and shaping them into video and sound compositions. Relying upon Allen Ginsberg’s axiom, “first thought, best thought” in order to initiate the move from thought to practice, I begin my investigations by quickly setting up my materials, gear and creating a shooting timeline.¹⁶ For example in the *Echoes of Balance and Push* shoot, I placed the camera in a video rig case, and attached to a small portable tripod with a panorama lens. The rig provides unusual framing, angles and filters that are uncomplicated, responsive, and experimental (see Fig. 10).

I am inspired to approach objects and by extension art in new ways where an entirely new relation emerges. Smartphone technology is an important tool in my work, and in many ways essential to the type of improvisational representation I attempt to achieve. This is not to say that this work would not be possible without these digital media advancements, but rather that my process and practice are in many ways a logical extension of these emerging technologies. Ultimately, as an artist, the smartphone is a significant tool and also a technology that both shapes and defines, like any artistic medium, my work. In addition to capturing video images, I also record sound with the same technology and improvisational sensibility. The sound editing process begins with exporting the original video sound file from the iPhone onto a laptop and then importing the WAV, MP3 into an open source program called Audacity. The waveform is changed into stereo by adjusting the left and right channels and selecting the time code and cutting out anything extra. I add delay or reverb to the overall composition when needed, enhancing the sounds of birds or human breath, sometimes altering the beginning or the end. If completed, I export the track and overlay it on the final video edit, creating a temporal loop.

¹⁵ The video editing process is a compositional study. There is a flow in how I process pieces that tries to capture my lived experience. I want to get to the heart of a piece, searching for the dream seed, the sound-score, cutting around that image or alternatively the climax, giving space for the piece to breathe on either end. I use two apps called Splice and Vintagio, mainly to explore time(ing/tempo) and then make the first cut. I export the file to Final Cut Pro on my laptop and then make the second edit by responding to the individual parts, while adjusting the overall tempo and time accordingly. Analysing the footage I listen, reflect, remember, seek-out verbal cues, waiting for that moment, which is sometimes found in the beginning or the middle or end.

¹⁶ Beat poet Allen Ginsberg *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews*.

PROJECT LOG #4 - SERENDIPITY AND IMPROVISATION

Description: investigation of 12' weather balloon in landscape.

Location: Aldergrove BC.

Objects: weather balloon, iPhone camera, barn, chair.

Technique: movement around a barn using limbs and momentum to hold balloon off the ground.



Fig. 10. Prophecy Sun, 2014. *Echoes of Balance and Push, Found Barn (Aldergrove B.C.)*. Photograph.



Fig. 11. Prophecy Sun, 2014. *Echoes of Balance and Push, Found Barn (Aldergrove B.C.)*. Video Stills.

DREAM LOG #6 - TRANSFORMATION

It is 9:48 p.m. and I am reading the Very Hungry Caterpillar to Owl. When I was little my mother read me another edition of the same book. Some of the pages were worn, torn at the edges and in some sections falling out. In the story, and on the pages themselves, the caterpillar ate its way through each piece of fruit, page after page, until it became satisfied and slept. The little bug did these actions again and again until it was transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

WEATHER BALLOON AS INFLATABLE ART OBJECT

Throughout my time at Emily Carr University the weather balloon has been a consistent and ongoing material artifact of my practice. During the first year of the Master's program my artworks incorporated giant inflated weather balloons and videos with soundscapes of physical exertion; in the final year of research the work has focused on immersive video experiences using the ceiling as the projection space. Throughout the projections, a figure is depicted carrying a weather balloon within lush environments, conjuring contradictory images of grace, struggle, paradise and wilderness. Like the weather, the balloon remains ephemeral, emotional, larger than life and at times uncontrollable.

Two contemporary artists that also use weather balloons and inflatables in their practice are Ana Rewakowicz and Kelly Nipper. Montreal based Rewakowicz creates work with inflatable objects to explore the relations between portable architecture, the body and the environment (Rewakowicz website). In her *SleepingDress prototype 1-2*, she wears a kimono-like-dress that when inflated changes into a cylindrical container inhabitable by one or two people (see Fig. 12). Rewakowicz purposefully situates her work in landscapes to highlight the natural and artificial relationship of the body to culture and space. Rewakowicz also uses inflatable forms as a surface to be projected upon or through (Rewakowicz and Gaëtane 10-15).



Fig. 12. Ana Rewakowicz, 2005. *SleepingDress prototype 1-2*. Digital Photograph. Used by permission of Ana Rewakowicz.

Multimedia artist, Kelly Nipper uses weather balloons or a representation of a balloon in narrative stories, choreographic performance and projections. In her *Floyd on the Floor*, she presents a site-specific score, featuring parachutes, elaborate movement sequences, focused on representations of weather systems and time (see Fig. 13).

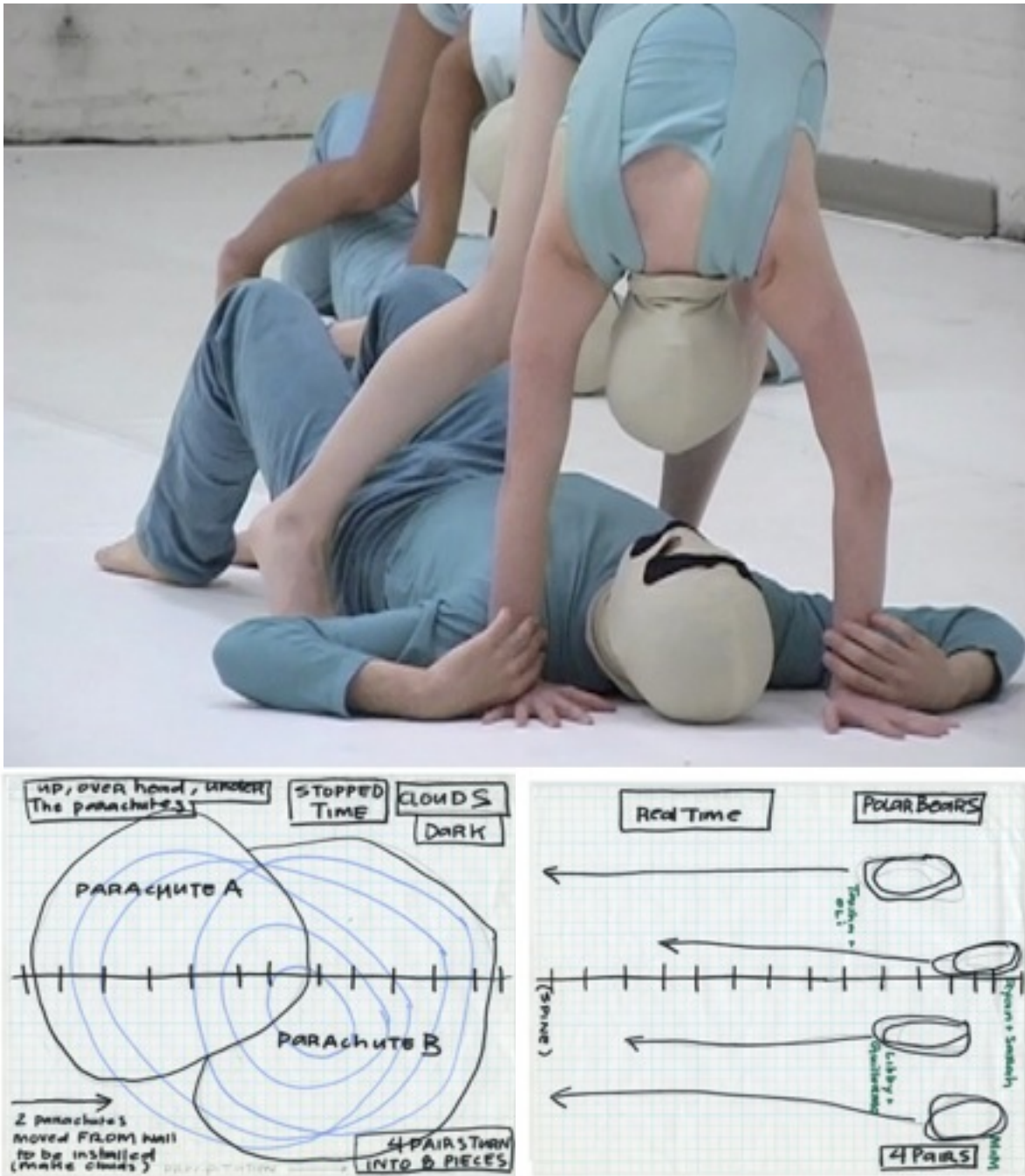


Fig. 13. Kelly Nipper, 2007. *Floyd on the Floor*. Digital Photograph. Used by permission of Kelly Nipper.

Nipper created *Floyd on the Floor* as a starting point for her interest with the science of movement and Laban's concepts of kinesphere. Interested in controlling her process through a series of choreographed steps, she presented her ideas in front of an audience (Moss 10). In addition to her attraction to the inflatable balloon, Nipper also draws on research from dance, cinema and sound composition. The ways in which she uses sketches in her practice has informed my own choreographic movements and how I plan the execution of my work.

Rewakowicz's work is inspiring in how she uses inflatables, negotiates landscapes, and projects visuals onto unconventional surfaces. And Nipper's practice connects to my own in how she works with inflatables in her various projects including durational performances, musical scores, dance and storytelling. An important distinction is how I have continually put my own body in front of the camera or audience and work collaboratively with the material. The weather balloon responds to my movements all the while communicating its own gravity and vibrancy. The balloon becomes a dance partner with my body in front of a camera, the choreography an improvised repetition of tasks including wandering, carrying, climbing, walking, crawling, falling, and crouching. Through these actions the balloon exists independently and has its own desire.

Echoes of Balance and Push

In *Echoes of Balance and Push* (see Fig. 11), the study of the weather balloons began as processes of moving through outdoor landscapes carrying the object across distances. The work experiments with dramatic environments and ritual-like responsive movements in order to shift and transform the inner sense of self, aiming to capture the difficulties and complexities of a mother and child relationship. The process began with investigations into Bodyweather¹⁷ and Butoh practices, using the shape, environmental forces and self reflexivity guide, to let my movement patterns follow the lead of the balloon.

In this piece, weather balloons are carried across varied terrain and activate the landscape. The gallery installation consists of three video monitors placed along a wall showing looping clips of me moving and negotiating with a weather balloon on three separate days: one windy, one rainy and one snowy. In front of the three monitors is a twelve foot weather balloon that accompanies the viewing experience (see Fig. 14). The large size of the weather balloon looms over the installation and affects the way the viewer experiences the work and the space they inhabit. Because of the large footprint of the weather balloon,

¹⁷ Bodyweather is a performance practice which amalgamates the body with the environment using the weather as the inspiration. It was originally created by the Japanese Butoh dancer Min Tanaka, who describes "the performer's body as constantly changing through processes occurring in- and out-side their body" (Bodyweather Website). In traditional Butoh dance practices, the body is seen as being moved from an internal or external source rather than consciously moving a body part.

the viewer is compelled to be in close proximity to the three screens. Each monitor is 22 inches wide with built in speakers. The looping actions on the screens move in and out of frames. The “lo fi” soundtrack is of wind, birds, and a woman grunting and gasping as she navigates the unpredictability of the balloon within diverse weather conditions. In each of the three videos, I am wearing a different evening gown, holding the weather balloon above and off the ground as I move in an undefined loop around the barn.

In each video, the environment is the same, an outdoor setting situated by an old monolithic dilapidated barn (see Fig. 14). The siding is covered in moss, the windows and doors are closed and boarded-up. I move in a fixed pattern whilst carrying the weather balloon traversing the space in a ritualistic way. Similar to Butoh practice, dance icon Anna Halprin’s RSVP Cycles there is an intense focus on everyday sound and movements (Schechner 232-236). My research here encompasses choreographic practices based on the shifting of weight and repetitive motions. I am drawing upon this existing dance research and incorporating it into my own artist practice.

Condensation and other moments

In the installation, *Condensation and other moments*, I transformed a workspace into an immersive sensory landscape. I explore the materiality of a weather balloon using it as a metaphor for the entanglement between waking life and dreaming. The images originated from a shoot at an orchard and were projected onto the ceiling and walls of a room that included sprinkler pipes, rafters and other challenging architectural features. I see my experiments with this space as a liberation from convention. Through the layering of multiple projections and sound compositions the space becomes occupied in new ways.

The projected images are of me walking around an idyllic orchard currently rented by my parents, with the weather balloon, shot during three different seasons. My repetitive movement become a meditative act not only in performance but also in the execution of their setup and takedown. The act of being surrounded by lush foliage (see Fig. 16), grass, wild landscape, sounds of life, brought up the question of what it means to have a nurturing relationship with the world around me. I also had a deep desire to be within close distance to my parents’ home, next to a flowing creek bed that offered a continual white hum of noise in the background of each shot. The terrain offered a plethora of possibilities and potential shooting scenarios for iterations over the four seasons of a year.

In the installation the video footage from six projectors overlaps, weaves, and bleeds across the ceiling space, in a prismatic display of gradations, colour, sound (see Fig. 15). Often obscured throughout the illuminations is a figure carrying a weather balloon within lush environments, conjuring images of paradise and wilderness. The sound composition emerges as a looping array of ambient textures, vocal meanderings, and natural environmental reverberations. The vocals move in and out of focused

humming, sliding up and down scales. The interplay between breath and humming slowly increases hopefully producing internal resonance and haunting tones. *Condensation and other moments* is a sensorial experience. Upon entering the space, the viewer must look up to see the work and explore the area, take note of the building sounds coupled with the ambient sound composition. Through the prismatic imagery and dense sound, the viewer is enticed to immerse themselves in the experience, perhaps invoking a dreamlike encounter between interior vibrations and exterior reverberations.

PROJECT LOG #5 - SPACE TRANSFORMATION

Description: *Echoes of Balance and Push* installation.

Location: Concourse gallery, Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

Objects: weather balloon, iPhone camera, barn.

Technique: movement around a barn using limbs to hold balloon off the ground.



Fig. 14. Prophecy Sun, 2014. *Echoes of Balance and Push*, (Concourse Gallery). Digital Photographs.

PROJECT LOG #6 - SPACE TRANSFORMATION

Description: *Condensation and other moments* installation.

Location: Mitchell Press building.

Objects: weather balloon, projectors, iPhone camera, ceiling, trees, grass.

Technique: movement around an orchard using limbs to hold balloon off the ground.



Fig. 15. Prophecy Sun, 2014. *Condensation and other moments*. Digital Photograph.



Fig. 16. Prophecy Sun, 2014. *Condensation and other moments*. Video Stills.

DREAM LOG #7 - LOSS AND REBIRTH

It is 5 a.m. and I have awoken to the sounds of footsteps in my room. A door closes and I fall back asleep. I remember an ache in my belly, hold my dress up and step into dark water. I have awoken again to the sound of footsteps, someone calling my name, touching my shoulder and asking me if I need any pain medication. I respond with a shake of my head. A door closes and I fall back asleep. I remember an ache in my belly, look up to see a forest of dark trees towering over me. That's when I realize that I hold a tiny baby. I sit and cradle it with my dress. I have awoken again to the sound of footsteps, beeping and open my eyes to see faces moving in and out of focus above me. I lie on a hospital bed, my left arm attached to an IV tube, my right arm holds my belly.

LOOKING FORWARD

Dreams are foundational to my artistic practice, offering a dynamic, sustaining resource that deepens the connection between my work and my life. I began this thesis wondering how dreams and objects interact and translate themselves from the unconscious realm to the conscious state and then into an artwork. Objects like the weather balloon enter my work through dreams and then take on further importance in the waking state through my improvised exploration of their material and symbolic potential. I try to reveal this vibrancy of subject and object.

The dream logs and project logs that appear throughout this essay further investigate a relationship to the dream space and provide a fundamental link to the documentation process. In this way these logs map my life and my work, and are central to this thesis. For example, in *Echoes of Balance and Push* new things are happening in the work such as showcasing dance in installation and the development of new forms of execution and exhibition.

Throughout the dream logs the essence of caring for a little one is implied and present through acts like nursing, cuddling, and care-taking. A more direct discussion of motherhood was excluded for reasons of breadth and theme. During my time at Emily Carr University I gave birth to a child, and my evolving relationship with her, as well as a concurrent motion capture research project of her nascent movements, are a rich part of the context of this thesis. A much larger discussion would be possible including the links between innate movements, early childhood development theories, and relationships to vibrant objects. Still, if one looks closely, one will feel the nurturing imprint of birth throughout this work, in a dance with objects wrapped in dreams wrapped in objects.

On the subject of dreams, I have only scratched the surface. This investigation is by no means an authoritative analysis on any one dream theorist, Freud and Jung especially, but rather a time and space-specific investigation of my own dreaming experience over two years. My brief consideration of Freud's theories has proven insightful. I acknowledge that Freud's work is problematic for its methodological rigidity, and homogeneous sample group of exclusively upper-class Austrian women. Still his ideas of condensation/displacement and manifest/latent content provide a relevant lens to navigate the public and personal world. Looking forward I will continue research on experimental dream theories and cognitive neurosciences and anticipate discovering more recent discussions on the subject.

My intention is to continue investigating the dream source through a series of immersive installations much like *Condensation and other moments*. By navigating this terrain I hope to further understand

how the dream operates within an artistic exploration. I am also interested in the possibilities inherent in the new ideas around objects which invite me to inhabit a waking version of the dream space that is speculative, playful and alive. Seeing the objects and technologies that I negotiate as real, breathing, and having their own agency is central to the emergence of my own generative practice. It is in this place between worlds that I will persist in observing, experimenting and recording. In the intersections between lively objects and dream impressions is where the space exists for continued speculation and interpretation of human experience.

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