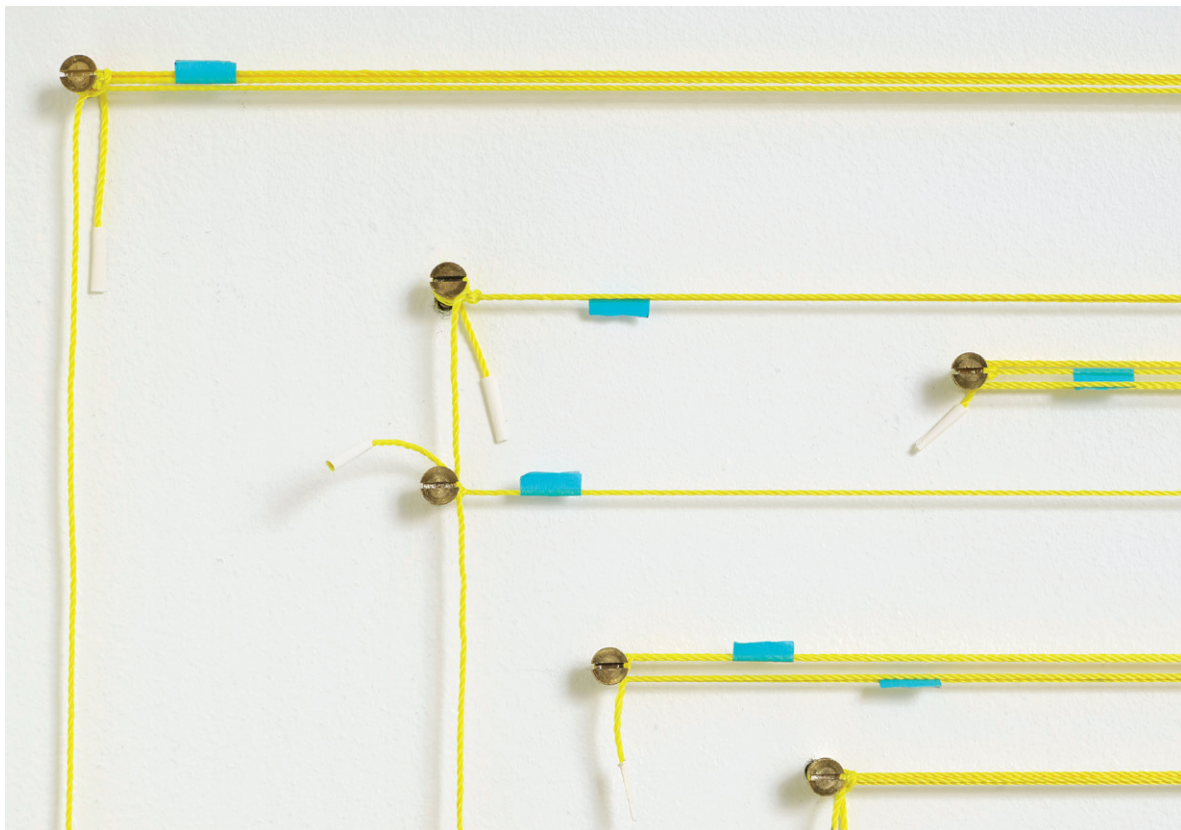


As  
happens

Anne  
Tallentire



April 2020

[MS] Anne, it struck me that when you scanned the Lydia Davis essay to email it to Lisa and me, you put the pages together a bit randomly so that this text discussing fragments became in itself fragmented. Between the last two pages in the scanned PDF there is also a ruler, as if an attempt was made to measure the content of these pages. I could not help but see this as a material gesture. What does it mean to measure these pages? Can it be understood as a refusal of meaning and content? Does the act suggest that the form is itself content?

[AT] Hmm, that random selection was not intentional. I didn't want to break the spine of the book I was scanning so I held the pages down with the first thing to hand, which happened to be a ruler. This might be related to the fact that I make work that draws on familiar everyday objects and scale. For *Area* (2016), I produced 1:1 scale laminate swatches in the colours and dimensions of everyday furniture. A series of collages I've made recently incorporate measurements corresponding to paragraphs found in books, so I am especially grateful for the introduction to Lyn Hejinian's essay, in which she writes on the paragraph,

Setting out 2, 2020 (detail)

Lisa Panting [LP]  
Malin Ståhl [MS]  
Anne Tallentire [AT]

From then to now, an arc of time lived, within a set of circumstances that have left their indelible mark, out of hand yet controlled, a sweeping spectre. Our communities, normalities, and expectations have been disturbed. We do not yet know where we will land.

This publication, Hollybush Issue 8, will be released as Anne Tallentire's exhibition, *As happens*, opens at the gallery to a public, in a time when gallery-going has become a muted, slowed activity as we navigate social distancing and assess the impact of Covid-19 on the nature of art production and the presentation of artworks within physical space.

The early correspondence of this booklet was intended as a counterpoint to the physical absence of art and human encounters. Wishing to engage with Tallentire's practice, we shared texts between us to think with and through. Later correspondence pivots to focus on new works made for the exhibition at Hollybush Gardens. We have chosen to let these two passages exist side by side in this booklet to mark the passing of one thing to another.

Two essays were chosen to refract Anne Tallentire's practice:

- 'Fragmentary or Unfinished: Barthes, Joubert, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Flaubert' by Lydia Davis<sup>1</sup>
- 'The Rejection of Closure' by Lyn Hejinian<sup>2</sup>

'To myself I proposed the paragraph as a unit representing a single moment of time, a single moment in the mind, its content all the thoughts, thought particles, impressions, impulses – all the diverse, particular, and contradictory elements – that are included in an active and emotional mind at any given instant.<sup>3</sup> I suggest that in an encounter with the abstracted shapes of paragraphs within these collage works, the viewer will on some level recognise these units of space even though they are emptied of textual content.

[MS] When you say 'object to flatten the page', it makes me reflect on a push and pull between giving and flattening volume which I find present in your work. Rooms, objects, and volumes are represented using flat building materials in different colours, tape, and so on. Do you think that the flatness of your work allows you to remain close to the immateriality of a concept? You materialise an idea, but you don't flesh it out by working with volume. Further, you don't fix it, and you would never decorate – you stop as soon as the structure or outline is there, and in cases where the work is sculptural, it can easily be disassembled and stacked away. Is it hard to know when to stop?

[AT] I think this flattening does allow me to remain close to the immateriality of a concept, primarily because the process of marking out to suggest a proposition or a plan maintains an articulation of what might be possible. Marking out is integral to the production of works that I build up from a ground, be it a sheet of paper or the floor, sometimes through shallow layers and other times as larger stacks or more complex assemblages. When making such works, I do need to work at knowing when to stop, which involves being alert to the point at which an emerging form articulates a halfway state between something and nothing.

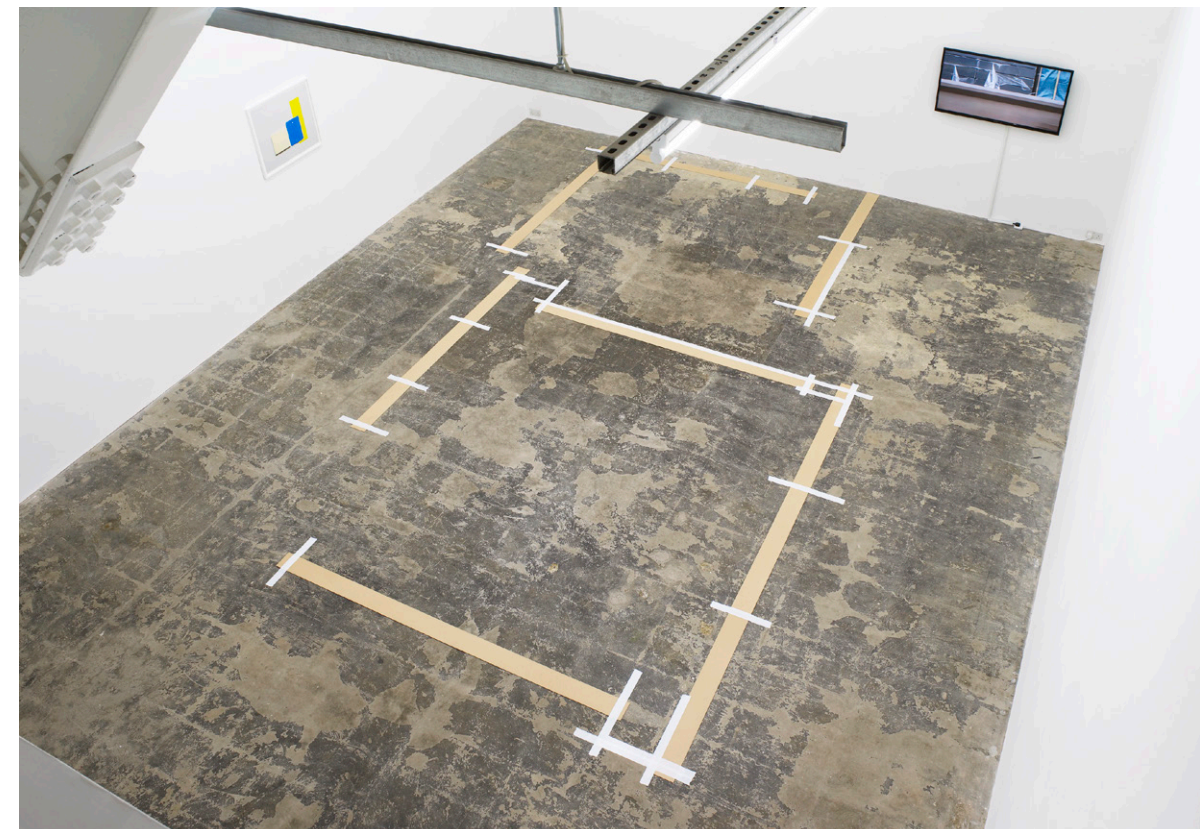
[MS] I'm diverting from our reading list here, but I recently read an essay by Karen Barad titled 'On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am', and one line in particular resonated with your work for me. Referencing Werner Heisenberg, Barad claims, 'Measurement is surely a form of touching.'<sup>4</sup> I haven't read Heisenberg so my interpretation of touch might differ radically from his intention, but when I think of touch in relation to measurement I think of standard sizes, such as the size of a bedroom or a kitchen, and how these

measurements affect our lives – in a sense, touch us. What would you say if I suggest your work measures that which is touched? By this I mean that you conceptualise and theorise around what touches us.

[AT] That is so interesting, Malin. I do work with the dimensions of given materials in relation to specific spaces in order to question the significance of both, but I have not thought of touch in precisely that way before. Limits – physical or otherwise – are relevant to my thinking as seen in *Walk* (2016), which addressed the issue of room size directly. Some years before I filmed incongruous markings made out of lengths of hardboard and gaffer tape on Fifth Avenue in New York. I later discovered this is a regular method used for filling over gaps in broken pavements. For *Walk* I made a floor drawing using these materials that replicated to scale the minimum square footage required for social housing single and double bedrooms as decreed by UK law. The contrast between the size of such rooms and the wide pavements of New York is obvious, registering inequalities regarding ownership and use.

I am thinking here also of *Interloper* (1999), a work John Seth and I made that involved making our way from the back to the front of a house (the home of Laura Godfrey-Isaacs, director of the Home 2 project) without touching the fabric of the building. To enable this process we laid down planks of wood upon whatever we could find to raise us above the floor. We described the work as an attempt to 'insinuate the other into the space of the here', the space of the here being the home of a stranger. Drawing on the fact that we were both culturally from elsewhere, the work questioned the rights of the disenfranchised in relation to space and place. Rather than an abstraction or theory, the 'other' in this enactment of non-touch also suggested the history of migrancy.

My interest in the politics of space was further addressed in *Shelter* (2016), a work that addressed emergency architecture. Over a period of two weeks, materials I had identified as necessary to build a temporary structure were carried from a store, laid flat in diagrammatic configurations in a public arena, and finally dismantled, relocated, and installed as sculptural stacks in a gallery. Through the performance of



Walk, 2016

continual physical endeavour and placement, this work sought to address the agency of those forced to live precariously in prescribed and often hostile environments.

[MS] You often make work using materials associated with construction work. One could say that the builder's merchant is your 'art supply shop'. *GF3-3* (2018), for instance, is a sculpture assembled out of OSB boards. Previously you have worked with fibre woven film fabric, polystyrene insulation grid board, hardboard, scaffolding materials, tarpaulin, palettes, softwood, and so on. Rather than making something solid with these materials – something fixed, stable, and enduring, requiring nails, screws, or glue – you assemble, pile, and stack. This act is reversible and temporary, a staging of sorts.

[AT] Yes, as I was describing, *Shelter* involved an intensive process of assembly and staging. This is one of a number of fairly recent works I have made with construction materials that speak to a sense of what is happening in the world in relation to infrastructure, socially in relation to the environment, or institutionally in relation

to economics. I also use objects and offcuts from other works that are in my studio, and things that have been randomly left or thrown out on the street. These temporary configurations rely on the frequently performative processes of moving, ordering, and re-ordering material that constitutes a vocabulary of actions intended to address the unfixed and the impermanent, and that also attest to kinesthetic memory from habits associated with daily life.

[MS] The material is not transformed into something that it is not. There is no pretense, no show. What is staged is the material itself: the material is presented and it is present. In *GF3-3* the OSB boards are stacked so that the edges – the outlines of the boards – function as vectors pointing in different directions. Placed along the edge of one of the boards is an A3 photograph of the same material that suggests an immaterial representation, one that points to an elsewhere outside of this moment and place in which the sculptural assemblage is staged. The vectors and the reproduced image can be seen as a gesture of opening up, suggesting that what we are looking at is a stack of OSB boards, yet not just this stack but all

other possible stacks or assemblages of this material. Our minds move beyond the situation at hand and connect to a library of situations in which this material might feature. This is more of a commentary to your work than a question, but would you like to say something on this?

[AT] Yes, in *GF3-3* the material is present, staged as itself, on the ground as it might be seen on a building site, with a photograph placed on one of the boards. The photograph shows a corner of a youth centre being built at the Calais refugee camp; visible is a small section of floor, a doorway beyond, and a stack of OSB boards laid up against one of the interior walls. The perspective draws the eye towards a spirit level lying parallel to the door sill, which led out to temporary dwellings built of lengths of wood and covered in tarpaulin, in the adjacent field. I set myself the task of strictly working only with the materials of the build depicted in the image and a print of the photographic image itself. As you say, the arrangement creates a vector, not unlike the shutter mechanism of the camera. The boards were placed in relation to the lines of the building focused upon in the photograph; this was

intended to draw attention to the shallow depth of space, and also to trigger speculation that had there been more sheets of board, a viable albeit make-do shelter could have been built, determined in form by the constraints of materials, rudimentary tools, and extremely testing physical and political conditions.

[LP] I have been thinking about *GF3-3* as a lynchpin in your oeuvre, and more recently as a 'fold'. I have been trying to source Gilles Deleuze's book on Leibniz during lockdown; my copy is on a shelf somewhere else. But what Deleuze saw in Leibniz's concept of the monad was a view in terms of folds of space, movement, and time. By extension, the world is interpreted as a body of infinite folds and surfaces that twist and weave through compressed time and space. This led me to *GF3-3*. At the base of the wall, which acts as support for the boards, there is a kind of bend or fold. And the photograph was initially circulated in a publication printed on newsprint paper, a carving into space-time logic through the index of the referent. The unfixedness you refer to is something Deleuze saw Leibniz anticipating in the subject – as nomadic and always in a process of becoming.

*GF3-3*, 2018



*Lag II*, 2016



This can of course be taken in any direction: this process is not necessarily one of comfort and joy, but possibly distress, hardship, and change. The nomadic here could also be thought of in relation to a limit. A limit of both infinite possibility and uncertainty, articulated through the precarious balancing of the units that comprise the work, how they rely on each other and reach an edge that defines a status that is unfinished and in flux.

[MS] Lydia Davis suggests that Hölderlin's texts for instance can be read 'as events rather than objects, processes rather than products'.<sup>5</sup> Should we be thinking about your works as events? Does your choice of stacking, assembling, and piling have something to do with an interest in process and impermanence? Could you say something about how you think about your work in relation to process?

[AT] There is no doubt that process is important to my work and I recognise totally the claim that 'form is not a fixture but an activity'.<sup>6</sup> In making *GF3-3*, I followed the rule that I would use the lines in the image as markers for the placement of the boards until all the lines have been

referenced. Although I did not 'perform' the work (where the act of making is in real time with an audience), the process of making in the studio on my own was as it would have been had the work been made in the presence of others. This performative way of working, to an imaginary viewer, produces a quality of attention that typically involves risk, improvisation, and the breaking of self-imposed rules. I'm wondering, Malin, whether you are also perhaps thinking of Alain Badiou's theory of 'the event' in terms of political and social disruption, which has also influenced me. It is perhaps relevant in this regard that the photograph in *GF3-3* was initially included in a publication printed on newsprint paper and distributed freely during the exhibition of *Shelter*, referencing the time limits of 'news'. Reuse and repurposing of materials is key to my practice, which goes back to the concept of impermanence and things being in flux and on the move. In some ways much of what I produce I see as being 'documents' of an event process where resolution is constantly deferred.

Furthermore much of my work is structured in serial form, engaging viewers in time and space

and prompting them to physically move across and around what is there. I guess this is relevant to the concept of the cooperative, where the workings of the work (processes of events) are made apparent for an active participant. But the work also entails an emptying out or removal that implies something yet to be re-arranged or concluded in what might be thought of as an encounter with the incomplete.

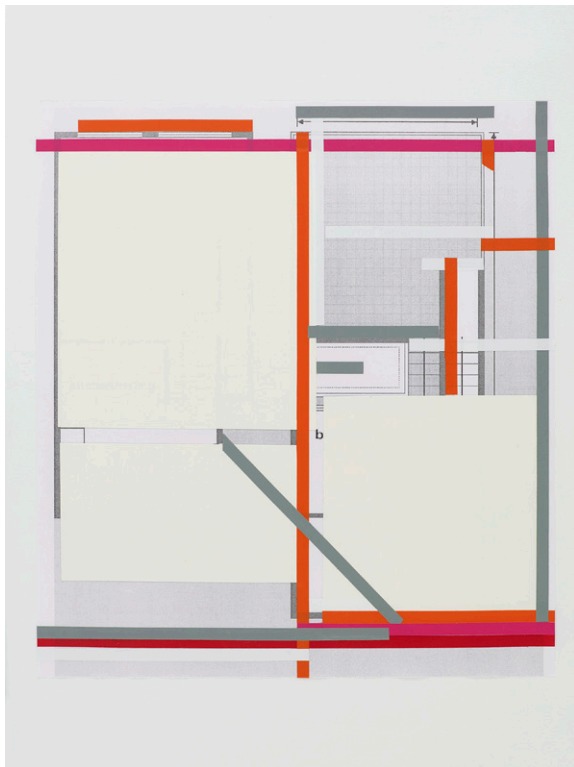
[MS] You are right, I am slightly under the influence of Alain Badiou, who I've been reading alongside a more accessible book on architecture titled *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, in which the authors Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein suggest that ornaments are used where there are edges between things, that ornaments can knit things together where they have come too far apart, for instance where one wall meets another.<sup>7</sup> Similarly in her text Davis quotes Eugène Delacroix: 'A building which is going up and where the details are not yet indicated gives one an impression that is different from what one gets from the same building when it has received its complement of ornamentation and finish.... The finished building encloses the

imagination within a circle and forbids it go beyond that.'<sup>8</sup> Explanation is another form of glue that bridges gaps. Your work is free of ornaments and explanations. My understanding is that you invite gaps and edges. Would you like to comment on this? Or put differently: can your work be understood as an assemblage of syntactical and grammatical elements without explanatory connectives?

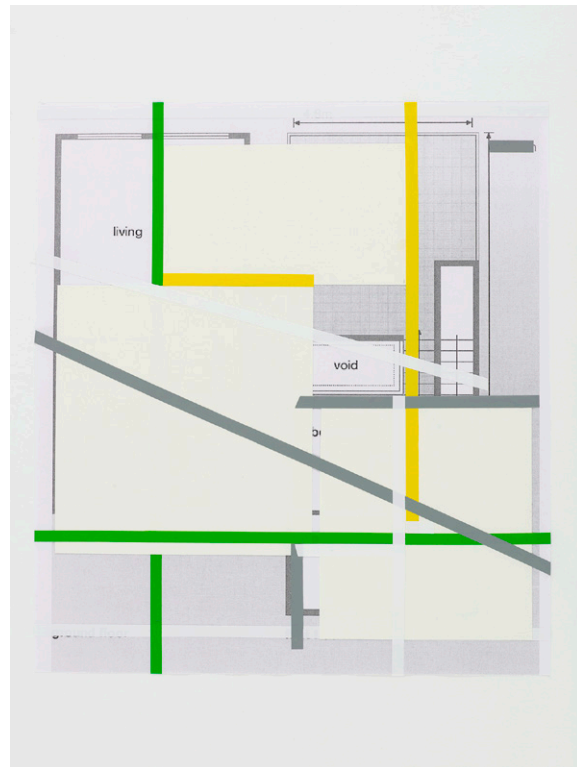
[AT] *Shelter* was a performative work that exploited properties of building materials, such as shape, colour, and application, to suggest meaning that could not have been ascertained from the building's completion. I am thinking of Delacroix's idea of 'the power of the unfinished'. However here I was not working with a concept of the unfinished but more so of components taken out of context and reworked to speak as singular units of language relating to that which had not yet become.

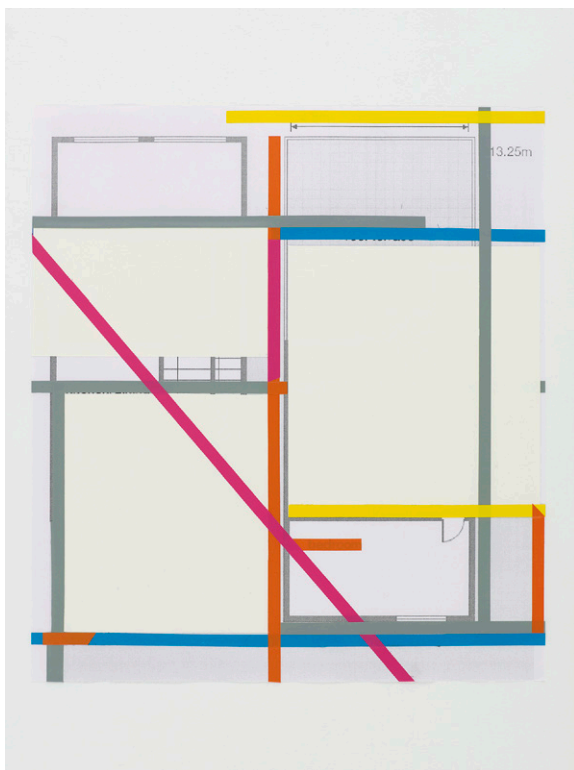
I relate to this statement by Hejinian: 'In the gap between what one wants to say (or what one perceives there is to say) and what one can say (what is sayable), words provide for

Another, 2020



More to, 2020





It is, 2020

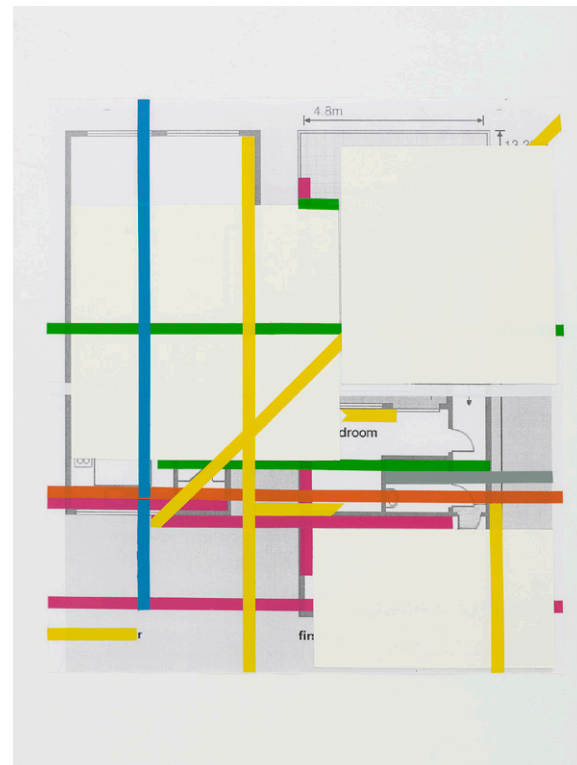
a collaboration and a desertion. We delight in our sensuous involvement with the materials of language, we long to join words to the world – to close the gap between ourselves and things – and we suffer from doubt and anxiety because of our inability to do so.<sup>9</sup> Through dislocating and relocating and distorting fragmented elements of familiar materials, I am also aiming to produce a reading of how objects speak of their singular histories and the world they belong to. So yes, I think my work could also be understood as an assemblage of syntactical and grammatical elements without ‘explanatory connectives’. In working with a lack of explanatory connectives there is hope nevertheless that the viewer will engage with the gaps.

[MS] Would you say that there is anxiety in your work?

[AT] Illegibility and gaps do create anxiety and I tend towards both! When one is displaced and outside a language or system, there can be anxiety. My early work *The Gap of Two Birds* (1990) addressed what this could mean for people in Ireland.

- 1 Lydia Davis, “Fragmentary or Unfinished: Barthes, Joubert, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Flaubert”, in *Essays One* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 204–225.
- 2 Lyn Hejinian, “The Rejection of Closure”, in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 40–58.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 369.
- 4 Karen Barad, “On Touching—the Inhuman That Therefore I Am”, *differences* 23, no. 3 (2012): 208.
- 5 Lydia Davis, “Fragmentary or Unfinished: Barthes, Joubert, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Flaubert”, in *Essays One* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 219.
- 6 Lyn Hejinian, “The Rejection of Closure”, in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 371.
- 7 Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, Max Jacobson, Ingrid Fiksdahl-King, and Shlomo Angel, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- 8 Lydia Davis, “Fragmentary or Unfinished: Barthes, Joubert, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Flaubert”, in *Essays One* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 206.
- 9 Lyn Hejinian, “The Rejection of Closure”, in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 56.

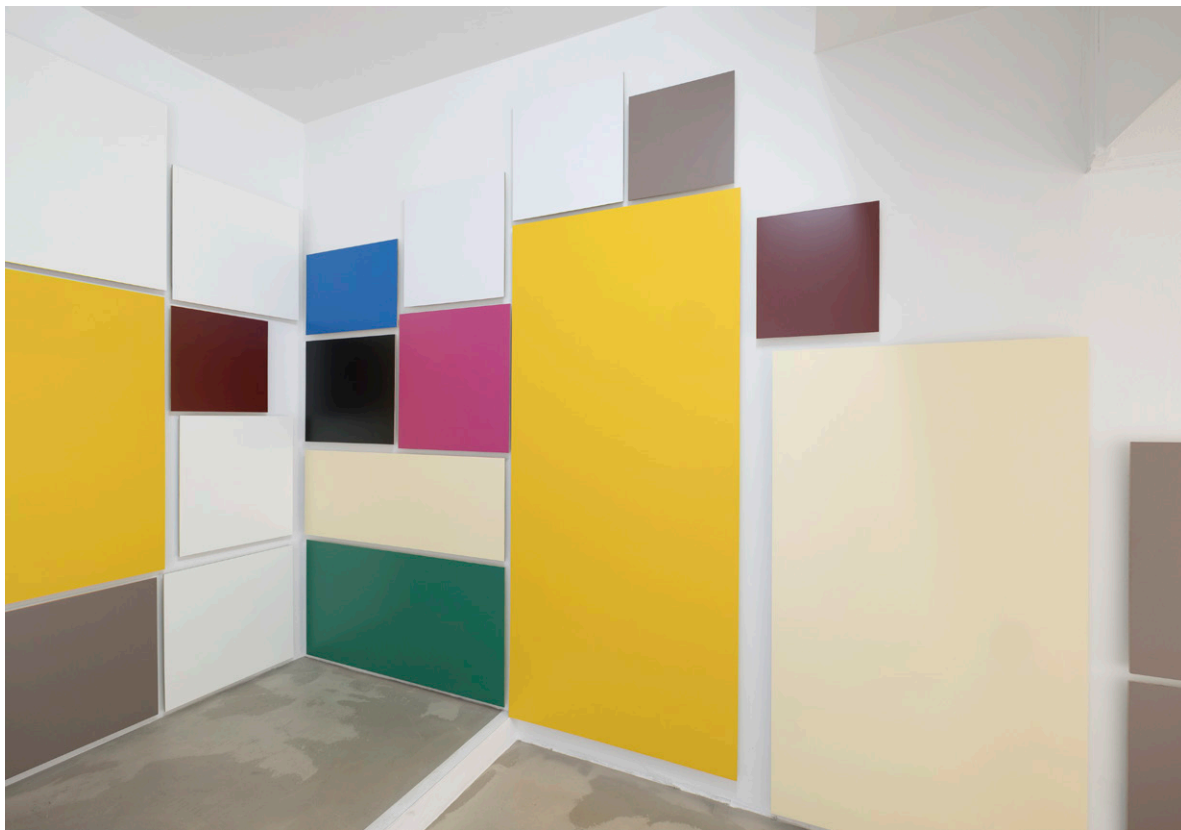
What is, 2020



August 2020

[LP] Returning to the idea of the gap that you mentioned in relation to Hejinian, I’m wondering about the empty spaces and the transposed paragraphs in your new collage works that will be shown in your exhibition. When I saw the works in the studio recently I was struck by what you were saying about the ‘synergy of the “between” text to the image’, the retinal memory from the paragraph of the book we are reading retained in the visual plane, a diagrammatic plane almost.

[AT] There are in these works two types of spaces at play: the spaces of buildings (primarily my home) and the imaginative spaces related to the act of reading. The floor plan I associate with potential – potential of life lived within space. Floor plans are recognisable, as are the patterns of text on a page. I began these works by scrutinising floor plans of buildings that had resonance for me, especially that of my home. The first drawing I made, though, was based on a social housing development in Graz, Austria. I am intrigued how different cultures design aspirational places for communities to live in, sometimes amidst punitive constraints.



Area, 2018, installation view at Grazer Kunstverein, Austria  
Image courtesy Grazer Kunstverein

In these works I play with perceptions and readings of generic patterns associated with daily life. By overlaying and obscuring details in architectural plans, composite images emerge. The shapes that are used to obscure the floor plans being the dimensions of paragraphs, it brings to mind the moment when one opens a book and scans the pages to glean some sense of the rhythm and pace of the text ahead. In other words, a typographical register is activated and put into dialogue with an architectural template.

[LP] We have talked about the idea of ‘working from within’, such as the building you live in, which you were initially drawn to because of the architecture. This architecture provides a mapping not only for the collages but also *Setting Out*, a site-specific work presented at Grazer Kunstverein in 2018, comprising bright green nylon string called builders line. You will present a related work, *Setting Out 2* (2020), in this exhibition at Hollybush Gardens. I think about the place walking has in your practice, the tracing of space through your footsteps. In this work you articulate your domestic space within the gallery through the use of string – I like the

idea of it activating so much with so little. The height at which the string is placed on the wall is very specific; at Hollybush Gardens it will derive from the positioning of a floor plan on the wall, departing from different strata of the plan. It makes me think of an excavation of lived experience and architecture, and of a reflection on the parameters of art. It seems almost Fluxus-inspired?

[AT] Well yes, I do work with found materials as well as, more recently, materials associated with construction. Builders line is designed for marking straight lines along relatively flat surfaces, and is used to transfer architectural proposals from drawings onto the ground, for ‘setting out’ a building. The height of the string relates to the conventions of this procedure at approximately 50 cm. However in a subversion of the setting out process, rather than attach the string to nails driven into vertical posts, I tied the string to nails driven into the gallery walls horizontally at intervals that denote specific architectural characteristics of my home.

[LP] Social distancing is a new phrase for 2020. It complicates our modernist-centred understanding of the urban home and experience, as work and domestic spaces become conflated and living in close proximity is challenged. The role of chance takes centre stage. I am wondering about the unforeseen and how this replicates or reduces the panel installation *Area*, which is installed and exhibited in reaction to site.

[AT] Yes, I have been interested in how over the period of lockdown we have had to come to know, use, and adapt to our homes and places of work differently. Theories relating to human dimension and interior space are having to be rethought. The panels in *Area* corresponded precisely to the dimensions of domestic furniture found in the common area of a housing complex in Graz, placed there by the residents. This semi-open space full of arrangements of discarded furniture provided a shared area where the residents could both perform and experience a collaborative and, to some extent, improvised mode of habitation in close proximity to each other, outside the confines of their regular environments.

[LP] In the *Plan* series of collages (2020), already reproduced images are photocopied onto Xerox paper, using the copier as producer. There is an embedded mechanical action that you then reconstruct over and above of where the laser of the copier has acted as a ‘camera without lens’. It is the copied version we are left with and that forms the ‘ground’ for the series. There is an axis between environment, mode of being, and performance that I feel is so constitutive of these works as well as *Setting Out*. There is a tacit quality that speaks of omission. Both the biographical and the political is dug in.

[AT] The infinite reproducibility of the photocopy draws me to this technology. I used this alongside a paradoxical process of inscription involving drawing with tape: paradoxical in that this process simultaneously hides and reveals. In the recent work the biographical and political are cyphered through material references to my books and the space of my home, where I have been working these past months. While searching for paragraphs according to rules I set for the work, unexpected connections between the texts arose for me. However although this biographical register is embedded



Area, 2020



in the work, it is hidden and operates primarily as a structuring mechanism.

[LP] Looking through your documentation, I am struck again by the use of different formats of tape. Tape used as an act of drawing and demarcation, an act of defining territory but also visual pleasure. You refer to Fluxus as a movement with potential in the present. It makes me think of the role of play and improvisation. Recently you talked about chance and spontaneity as a paradigm within a set of parameters.

[AT] *Area* speaks to the experience of people living in close proximity in crowded housing. Now that there is a new reality affecting how we live, the chance procedures and the improvised actions central to my working processes will be further determined by the unknown, unpredictable, and unforeseen. As I am about to embark on a new iteration of *Area*, I cannot predict how this unforeseen context we find ourselves in will determine what is made. To some extent the recent collages and indeed all the work I am showing here could be said to draw on a Fluxus approach – but perhaps

even more so Arte Povera! However the redefinition of art and life associated with Fluxus is relevant.

[LP] The new collage works create a doubling between archive and future possibility. They appear simultaneously open and closed. They also remind me of your series *Interspacing* (2016–2019) that are also so bound to architecture – or an anarchitecture. You are infusing these spaces with a proposition. What could that allude to in more concrete terms do you think?

[AT] To some extent both bodies of work refer to how we might engage with the governance of space in terms of working within limits and rules. This issue of space has of course become amplified since the Covid-19 crisis, most acutely in densely populated places. Recent social distancing rules means we are all beginning to manage a specific measurement as a parameter of and for life. This raises issues that have been concerning me for some time regarding how legislation and economics decree what space citizens can take up in the world. The *Interspacing* works refer directly to the

environments where guidelines relating to the size of rooms and furniture are imposed by authorities frequently providing less than adequate space. Malin's earlier question regarding what it means to measure comes to mind here and makes me think that architecture will now have to rethink what separation means for the new social distancing environment, which also paradoxically confines us in time and space.

[LP] Yesterday I was on the tube from the gallery to Brickfield Studios. I had been thinking about Deleuze's concept of the fold, whilst worrying about this moment of public transport, which has become a rare experience for me. As I sat on the tube I noticed a poem by John O'Donohue and it felt so precise in that moment. Time, the role of chance, being in the city, and the altered conditions of experience within systems all seemed to collide.

Hollybush Gardens  
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all other photos by the artist

*This Is the Time to Be Slow*

John O'Donohue

This is the time to be slow  
Lie low to the wall  
Until the bitter weather passes

Try, as best you can, not to let  
The wire brush of doubt  
Scrape from your heart  
All sense of yourself  
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,  
Time will come good;  
And you will find your feet  
Again on fresh pastures of promise,  
Where the air will be kind  
And blushed with beginning.