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The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning
PHOTOGRAPHY IN PRACTICE

PhD Report



Arkitektur- og designhøgskolen i Oslo
The Oslo School of Architecture and Design

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PHOTOGRAPHY IN PRACTICE

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Research is a necessary prerequisite of an artistic practice, albeit with smooth transitions between thought and knowledge, for thought is not knowledge. The artwork is an abstract condensation composed of considerations that cannot directly take on a form, the sheer non-visibility of which can indeed have a homoeopathic effect. Knowledge, on the other hand, is form and thus exposed on a general platform on which it vacillates between commodity and free insight. What was once a lonesome, minor or also collective decision is now an offer of a teaching position. What was specific is now general, artistic research is in danger of becoming a common and constricting method and possibly suffering the same fate as Conceptualism, to which anyone can noncommittally refer. As a teacher at an art academy, I find myself increasingly subjected to an imperative of description. The dilemma is that I like to describe, but that in the future I will have to deal more and more with formulating goals. Contents can be described, but it is impossible to formulate an art class in view of an effect. That what makes up the teaching of art is its "purposelessness", the impossibility of describing a final "product" and the impossibility of defining the insights gained. Of course, we do want something to be created. We describe the classes, we believe in their necessity and relevance. But we can't say to which results they ought to lead. Everything else would be a kind of conditioning and a rupture in the relationship between students and teachers that aims at sovereignty. ... One of the truths of our profession (as teachers) lies not in conditioning budding artists but precisely in discussing the existing forms of conditioning.

Thomas Locher
Texte Zur Kunst June 2011

In fulfillment of the “mandatory work” (*pliktarbeid*) included in my contract as doctoral research fellow at AHO, I developed and conducted the master level elective course *Photography in Practice*.

My choice of the course title was based on the ancient Greek definition of *praxis*. According to Aristotle, there are three types of human activity, each one yielding a different kind of knowledge: *theoria*, the contemplation of the eternal and unchanging, yields theoretical knowledge, which has universal truth as its end; *poiesis*, the purposeful bringing-into-being of something distinct from its producer, yields productive knowledge, which has fabrication as its goal; and *praxis*, activity in the realm of the contingent, yields practical knowledge, which has action contributing directly to its author’s well-being (*eudaimonia*) as its aim. Both *poiesis* (*technē*) and *theoria* (*epistēmē*) uphold a subject-object relation to the world, while *praxis* entails *phronesis* (practical wisdom derived through personal judgment) and sustains a subject-subject relation to the world.¹

Photography in Practice, like the research project within which it is situated, is propelled by my wish to introduce intuition at the beginning of the creative process towards an architecture and based on the proposition that photographic practice constitutes a beginning in answering the question: *How can we disclose our intuitive insights and how can we bring these into the production of spatial experience?*

In the background of the originary wish is the cognizance that analytical reason has come to dominate the design of architecture and the belief that starting from intuition and engaging this in a transactional relationship with the intellect endows the architect’s creative process with an authentic footprint, which is currently most urgently needed.

We can not command our intuition, but we can make room for it to arise by subordinating the analytical mind. The intuitive mind surfaces in fleeting apprehensions and the inherent swiftness of the photographic apparatus enables the operator to record these instances spontaneously. Photographs produced under these circumstances retain the fascination present at the moment of their genesis and provide the ground for re-developing this and disclosing insights through recollection and analytical reflection on the image.

The photographic image is hereby not the end of a creative act, but the beginning of a creative process. As this process is presently predisposed towards the production of spatial experience, the perceived significance of each image is affected by this bent and influenced by the operator’s disposition. Consequently, in the present context photography is understood as a *praxis*, as *photographing*, but a poetic *praxis* nevertheless.

¹ ARISTOTELES and CRISP, R. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.107.

Starting from the photographic record of a first intuitive impulse and following the disclosure and crystallization of insights latent in this, the author returns to photographing so as to continue his exploration in the disclosed direction. A dynamic and singular journey, which progresses via the negotiation of intuitive action and analytical thought, is thus set into motion. The evolution of this exploration *through* photographing emerges unpredictably as it moves towards the design of an architecture.

The ultimate aspiration of *Photography in Practice* has been to open a way for architecture students to design spatial experience by beginning from intuition. The self-directed processes enacted in the span of the course explore the possibilities of this mode of working by practicing photography towards an architecture along idiosyncratic paths, and they do not constitute manifestations of a prescribed procedure or a foolproof method.

. . .

Photography in Practice was conducted twice as an elective course for master level students at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design. When the course was initially offered in the Fall of 2010 to a total of two hundred and one students at the school, fifty-three selected it as their first choice and sixty-four as their second or third choice, making it the most popular elective course in the history of the school. The second edition of the course was offered a year later and it was again first on the list of students' elective course preferences. Enrolment was limited to fifteen students in 2010 and it was reduced to ten in 2011, due to a more personalized and time demanding teaching approach in the second edition of the course. Priority was given to students in their last year of studies. Previous experience with photography was not required, but students were expected to have access to a camera that they could use throughout the semester and to be comfortable with its functions and operation at the outset of the course.

According to the guidelines for elective courses at AHO, the group met one full day every week for ten weeks, and for a whole week right before the final presentation. Fifteen days in total.

In the first session of the course, I presented the key functions of the photographic apparatus and familiarized students with the relevant terminology. Thereafter, we began our weekly sessions with an hour-long thematic presentation by myself on the work of pertinent photographers or artists. Presentations included topics such as *Seeing Photographically*, *Equivalence*, *Photography and Place*, *Photographic Narratives*, *Artists Photographing*, and *The Spatial Artifact*. Special emphasis was given to work by artists who have used photography as part of their creative process – for example: Andrei Tarkovsky, Gerhard Richter, Ólafur Elíasson, Jan Dibbets, and Ed Ruscha – and to artists working in a spatial mode – for example: Rachel Whiteread, Tadashi Kawamata, Do Ho Suh, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and James Turrell. These presentations were followed by a brief discussion amongst the group on the work shown and the assigned reading. For the rest of the day, students presented the work that they had produced since the previous session and we discussed this together, trying to find a direction for the work to be produced in the following week.

The course was sectioned in two phases. During the first phase, students engaged in acts of photographing and then reflected on their images. I encouraged them to act without premeditation and only afterward to consider, in the context of their exploration, the significance and consequence of their acts through the images that these had yielded. After the midterm presentation, students were expected to channel the insights that they had disclosed during the first phase of the course towards the design and production of a site-specific artifact that embodied and unfolded this knowledge. In both editions of the course, the site for this task was the school's exhibition gallery and students chose appropriate locations within or around this to develop their artifacts.

Students presented their output from the workshop in an exhibition that included the spatial artifact, images from their photographic practice, and a brief text about their journey. I designed the exhibition myself, aiming to bring the work together into a synergic whole. I placed the texts on the glass side of the gallery, the images on the wall side, and the artifacts in the space between them. I then connected the three components of each project with a red line, constructing thus an interconnected network in the space of the gallery.

While in the first edition of the course students discussed their work with the whole group throughout the semester, in the second edition I decided to start with one-to-one feedback sessions. Students shared their work with the rest of their colleagues for the first time during the midterm presentation, and although each project was unique, they were all well understood and discussed by the group because they shared a common frame of conditions. Thereafter, weekly discussions were held in groups of three to four students, and while steering the conversation I encouraged everyone to contribute to it. Both the one-to-one and the group discussions aimed to help students articulate their insights and focus their direction. I recorded these conversations so as to track the development of the processes enacted during the course.

My decision to change from group discussions to individual ones was based on the recognition – substantiated by student feedback at the end of the first edition of the course – that students felt more comfortable exploring the consequences of their work and dealing with the uncertain nature of their path in a more private setting. In this way students also had more time to produce during the day when the course was conducted, since the workload for elective courses at AHO is not supposed to extend beyond the day when the course meets.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned structural differences between the first and the second edition of *Photography in Practice*, the ambition of the course – to introduce students to a process of designing that starts from intuition and evolves through the transaction of this with analytical reflection – remained unaltered. Below are the directives I gave to students so as to set them on their path and to help them steer this:

- Consider Freeman Patterson's words from *Photography and the Art of Seeing*: "Letting go of the self is an essential precondition of real seeing. ... Seeing, in the finest and broadest sense, means using your senses, your intellect, and your emotions. It means

encountering your subject matter with your whole being. It means looking beyond the labels of things and discovering the remarkable world around you. . . . When you let go, new conceptions arise from your direct experience of the subject matter, and new ideas and feelings will guide you as you make pictures.”

- Start your process by making room for your intuition. Switch off your tendency to rationalize and in the company of your camera concentrate on your presence in a place of your choice and try to experience this as directly as possible.
- Avoid the temptation of hunting for seductive images or rushing into serial shooting. Take your time to absorb what you are looking at and try to see this with fresh and curious eyes. Consider Marcel Proust’s words: “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”
- Continue being in this position until an apprehension, a fleeting perception on a direct and immediate level, arises in you – or otherwise said, until a spatial instance fascinates and touches you in an inexplicably profound way.
- Use your camera as an extension of your body and direct it – as you would direct your hand to pick an apple when you are very hungry – toward the source of your fascination, producing spontaneously a record of this (fundamentally inexpressible) moment. Do not try to rationalize or to aestheticize your apprehension, just document what you see as straightforwardly as possible.
- Print the photograph and then take your time to recollect and to contemplate through it the apprehension present at the moment of its genesis. Try to unpack insights latently embedded in the image onto your conscious mind by verbalizing your thoughts and feelings. Consider not what *is* in the photograph, but what *you* find in it. This is a highly subjective venture and there is not a right and a wrong answer.
- Keep the insights that you disclose and crystallize in words as luminous points in your consciousness that can guide you, but do not let them restrain you.
- Regard your camera as your ally while you continue your exploration in the disclosed direction. Be alert and tuned to what you have already discovered, but do not attempt to illustrate or validate this. Instead, immerse yourself in the moment and leave ample room for your intuition. As before, document spontaneously the moment of your apprehensions.
- Again, print your photographs and reflect in their presence on the moment of their genesis. Verbalize your thoughts freely, but as precisely as possible, as you search for the significance of the impulse upon which you acted and pressed the shutter release on your camera. Add newly disclosed insights to previous ones.

- Repeat in successive cycles the two preceding actions until you sense that the insights that you have disclosed have become “dense” enough to constitute an intention that charges the production of a spatial artifact.
- As you begin to work towards your artifact – with quick drawings, sketch models, or other means you find appropriate – keep your intention clear in your mind but do not block your intuition. While experimenting with the material, the form, and the placement of your artifact aim to give a presence and to open up (not to represent or illustrate) the insights that you have crystallized during your process.
- Keep reflecting on your work and fine-tuning how your insights became manifested in your artifact. Your process of designing and crafting the artifact will move along an increasingly willful and reasoned track until this reaches a state of settled precision.

. . .

Photography in Practice encouraged students to acknowledge the presence of their intuitive capacity, to nurture this, and to learn from it. Starting from the photographic record of an apprehension, participants in the workshop maneuvered their exploratory processes between intuitive production and analytical reflection, gradually revealing insights that came to guide the design of an artifact, which unfolded the knowledge that they had gained on the way. Thus, the *praxis* of photography led to a *theoria* of spatial experience and eventually to the *poiesis* of an architecture.

The projects developed by students during this workshop are examples of how intellect and intuition can collaborate and supplement each other during the creative journey. The evolutionary path of these self-directed and singular processes emerged unforeseeably as each individual kept uncovering previously unthought of findings. When Erich Fromm wrote that “creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties” he pointed out precisely the need to trust and to follow the unpredictable ways of intuition during the process of creation.

As an instructor I applaud Jerome Bruner’s position, put forth in *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, that the prime purpose of education is to stimulate inquiry and to build skills in the process of knowledge-getting rather than to offer knowledge as a product. Courses like *Photography in Practice* cultivate creative, self-reflective, and free-thinking individuals, empowered with the confidence to trust their intuition. And since the students of today are the practitioners of tomorrow, this mode of working will extend to and affect the wider community (of architects in this case) and bestow upon its output the humanism inherent in it, which is currently most urgently needed.

Participants in both editions of the course confirmed unanimously, through their feedback to questionnaires I handed out to them, the challenge of overcoming the notion of photography as a tool for documenting the already-made and learning to practice it towards the not-yet-made.

Forgoing the certainty of a method and accepting the unpredictability of an exploration based on intuition was another barrier that students had to surpass. These difficulties were gradually tackled through personalized coaching.

The following excerpts from the questionnaires filled out anonymously at the end of the semester give a first hand account of the students' impressions from the course:

Initially it was a bit hard to grasp what we were supposed to look for and photograph, but gradually it became clear. Although we struggled in the beginning, I don't know how the process could have been structured differently.

I have seen it as a privilege to have individual talks. My process became focused, clear, and only for me, which gave me a lot. I got more confident in my work, and more aware of what I was working with.

For me the strongest point of the course was the experience of how the intuitive act of photographing could give such wonderful results for almost everybody! The way the one-to-one critiques were set up in the first phase and then how we continued in groups was also a strong part of the course.

I learned to take photographs in a different way. Not just for documentation, but as a way of seeing things with new eyes. Though it was hard, I managed (in the end) to bring what I had found into the artifact. ... It's a different way to think and talk about architecture and we will grow into it. ... I think I will understand what I have learned as time passes by.

As the last statement aptly affirms, it is not possible to pinpoint how learning processes such as the one developed during this workshop will flourish in the future and where exactly they will lead. Neither is it possible to package the course outcomes as commodities or to gather them into an instruction manual that outlines a procedure ready for future application. The import of courses like *Photography in Practice*, and of practicing-research at large, is akin to a seed that grows with time in the same unpredictable ways in which it was itself generated.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of how students will develop what they have learned, the course was successful in putting them in touch with their intuitive capacity and in introducing them to a mode of working that integrates intuition and analytical skills in a synergic way. Viewed from a slightly wider perspective, this workshop managed to elicit an increased level of self-confidence in students, giving them thus the foothold to trust their instincts, to think freely, and to initiate and follow their own self-directed creative processes along unforeseeable tracks.

In the pages that follow I document in detail the development of two student projects from the second edition of the course and I include four projects from the first edition, in their abridged version, so as to give a sense of the breadth and variation of the course's output. In reporting these projects, I aim to expose the pedagogical implications of working in the mode developed during the workshop and to contribute to the discussion on the significance of this to the education of architects and to the profession at large.

COURSE PARTICIPANTS

Fall 2011

Cecilie Lande Andersen
Synne Undersrud Farstad
Maja Rørvik Haanæs
Sigrid Rossebø Hansen
Joachim Haug
Ann Karin Kilen
Simen Christoffer Lennertzen
Emil Lundh
Heleri Nommik
Sebastian Gulliksen Stokkebokjær

Fall 2010

Daniel Peter Barth
Saulius Bulavas
Anders Eidstuen
Petter Colin Røhr Ewart
Håkon Dahlstrøm Formoe
Hedvig Steinsvåg Hansen
Hans Bjørn Holther
Wing Yi Hui
Ole Aleksander Larsen
Frode Magnus Næss
Øyvind Pharo Odden
JK Orvik
Ove Joachim Svella
Ann-Kristin Tønning Sørensen
Lap Ming Wong

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CECILIE LANDE ANDERSEN



30 AUGUST 2011

PL: What fascinated you here? What motivated you to take this photo?

CA: I was captivated by the perspective and the depth.

PL: Perspective and depth are not the same. Perspective is an objective or geometrical phenomenon, while depth can be apparent, a question of perception. Can you define your fascination more precisely?

CA: Well, I was especially intrigued by how the staircase appeared through the wire mesh, this gave a sense of depth to the space, which is what grabbed my attention.

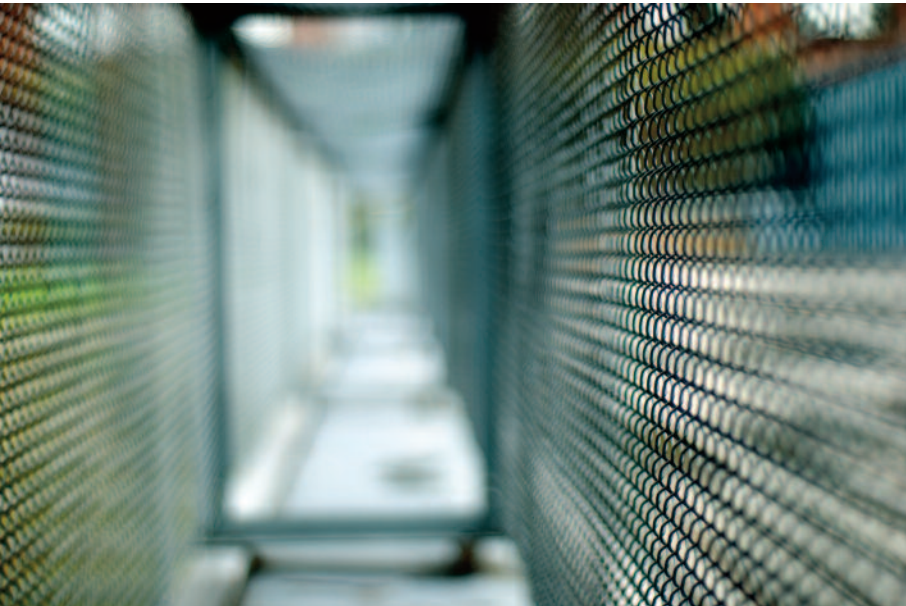
PL: Can you talk more about this sense of depth?

CA: It is hard to put it into words. I have always been fascinated by how planes in a space appear and disappear depending on where my eyes are focused.

PL: So you perceive space as a series of planes?

CA: Yes. And I am interested in how my perception of a space is affected when I shift my focus, how these planes fall in and out of sight, how they appear and disappear, even though they are always there in front of me.

PL: Shifting focus is a native function of both the photographic lens and of our eyes, but our eyes are much more agile than the lens and they have a relatively wide depth of field, so we hardly notice this operation even if we do it constantly, or maybe because we do it constantly. You can use the capacity of the photographic lens to limit the depth of field, focusing on different planes in space one at a time. See what you can learn from this exercise.





06 SEPTEMBER 2011

CA: I took these photographs from the same spot and with the same lens. I used a wide aperture so as to have a shallow depth of field and I kept shifting the focus and taking a photo each time.

PL: What have you learned from taking these photographs?

CA: The space seems to change with every shift of focus. Different planes come into view while others "melt away" and disappear partially or completely. It was interesting and also surprising to see how my perception of this space was transformed from focus to focus.

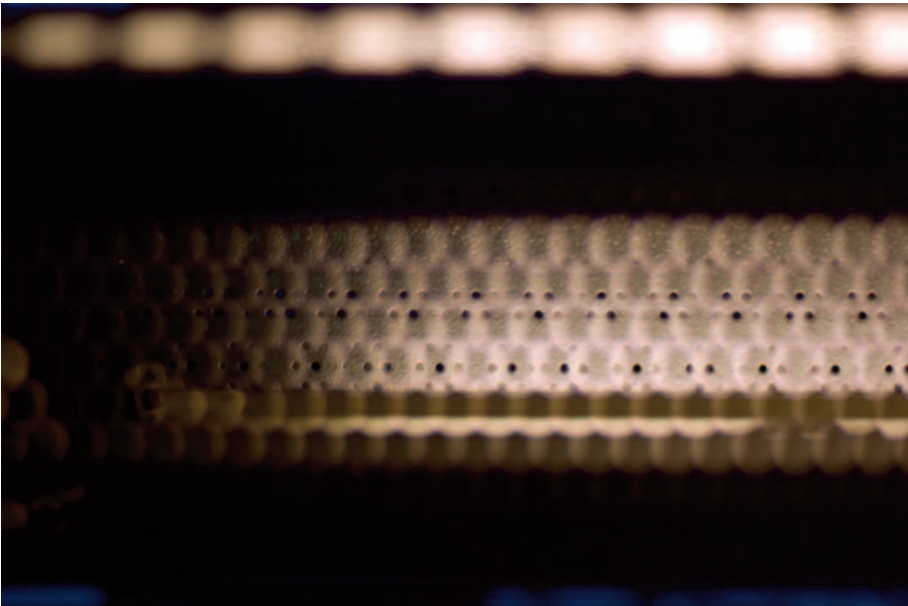
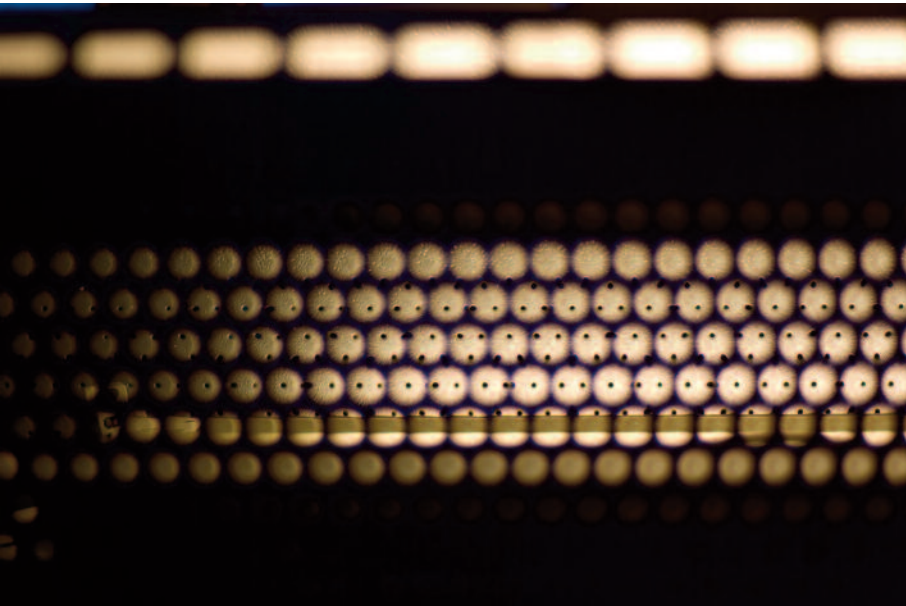
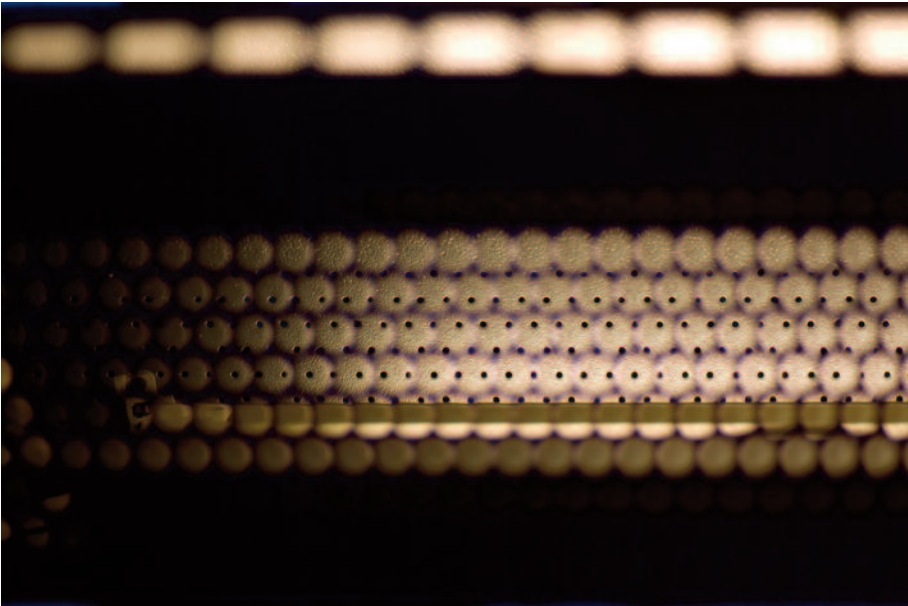
PL: So the space becomes subject to your perception, which is in turn affected by how your eyes function. You have exaggerated this function here by manipulating your lens and capturing its affect on your view.

CA: Yes, exactly. I am now reminded of this cabin I once saw where inside the glass there was a dense series of columns so that from the outside you could not see in but from the inside you could see out.

PL: Advertising images affixed on the windows of buses work in the same way. People inside the bus can look out through the small round perforations on the membrane, but from the outside and from a distance these perforations are not perceivable and so the image appears opaque. Now, where do you go from here?

CA: I'd like to explore further these workings of our eyes, to find out more about how spatial planes fall in and out of sight, and how this affects my perception of a certain space.

PL: OK, but proceed intuitively while still keeping your intention in the back of your mind. Don't try to rationalize or define things in advance, otherwise you will be just illustrating what you already know. Don't anticipate what you will find, leave ample room for new and unexpected findings. Print your photos and pin them up in a place where you spend time each day. You don't need to consciously reflect on them every time your eyes cross them, let them grow on you through your habitual contact with them and insights will gradually arise.





13 SEPTEMBER 2011

CA: It is difficult to say exactly what new knowledge I have gained from my latest exploration. I am still fascinated by how shifting focus manipulates my perception of a space and by how the camera can observe closely and capture this operation. It still surprises me to see how the layers of space that are out of focus almost disappear, I forget that they are there even through I know that they are in front of my eyes. What I find especially fascinating is how the plane that is in focus acquires an intensity because everything else is out of focus.

PL: Your latest series of images is more unpredictable than the previous in terms of the affect of each shift of focus. This is due to the lack of perspective and to the proximity of the planes of space between themselves and in relation to you. The element of surprise is quite potent here. So you have explored the phenomenon of depth through the capacity of lens to isolate planes in space.

CA: Yes. I remember our discussion about perspective and depth. It seems that there is a stronger sense of depth when there is no perspective. It is easier to isolate spatial planes when these are perpendicular to my line of vision, the affect of shifting focus from plane to plane is more unpredictable in this case, more surprising, and the experience is somehow thicker and more intriguing.

PL: Your photographic exploration has been consistent, and seems to be nearing its exhaustion in terms of what you can learn from it in this context. Soon you will need to start working on your spatial artifact. Have you given this any thought?

CA: I was thinking of modeling a space as a series of planes and then exploring this with my camera.

PL: Then follow your hunch and see where it takes you.





20 SEPTEMBER 2011

CA: I went to the basement to find my tripod and I saw all these overlapping layers of wire mesh! This was a lucky encounter, but I guess that I perceived the space in this way because my exploration for this course was on my mind.

PL: Yes, your perception was predisposed towards a certain way of seeing.

CA: When I started photographing it was very exciting to see how these grids appeared and disappeared as I changed focus. Each frame was so totally different even if it contained exactly the same space! Isolating these planes is a very basic manipulation of the functions of the camera, and I have not discovered something shockingly new. But by exaggerating and recording how my eyes move through space, I have now a better grasp of the mechanics of my vision and how these affect my perception and experience of a place.

PL: How did your body partake in this experience?

CA: As I was looking through the lens and shifting focus I felt as if my body was moving through the space even though I was photographing from the same spot. My relation to the space was affected by what I saw through the lens. When I focused on a plane close to me I felt more inside the space, I was drawn into the space and felt part of it. When the focus was far away, my body felt more disengaged from the space, especially when the nearby planes were out of focus. So my bodily experience was definitely affected by what was visible and what was not through the lens.

PL: So, you have explored how a space can reveal itself progressively and how this can be also a bodily experience, not just a visual one. But this does not necessarily happen as a linear progression from near to far or vice versa. Maybe you should use the stills from this series to make a movie, experiment with non-linearity and with transitions. How does a different sequence or different types of transition between the stills affect how you perceive the space? Think of this as a poem, instead of words you use photographs, to make something that is larger than the sum of its parts. Otherwise, you could also work with words that bring forth a space that is a series of planes that fall in and out of focus. Take a look at Carl Andre's concrete poetry for inspiration.

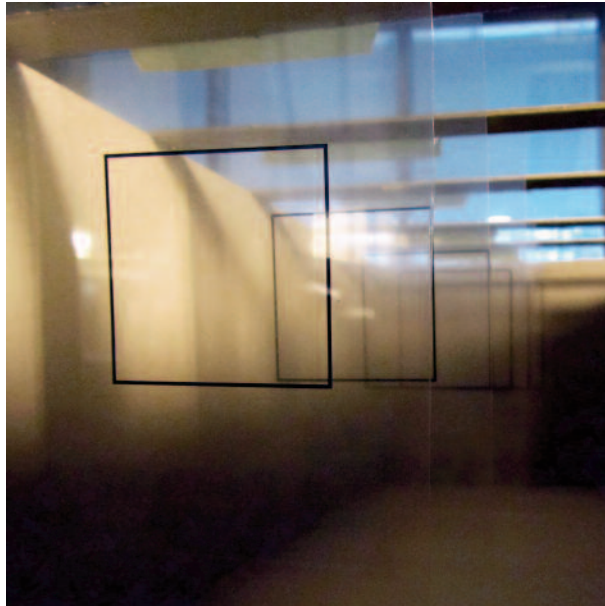
11 OCTOBER 2011

CA: I have made a movie using the stills from my last series of photographs. I experimented with the tempo of the transitions between the stills, and also with the sequence of the stills. The movie loops indefinitely and gives an experience of a breathing space.

PL: What have you learned from making this movie?

CA: I have seen how space fluctuates in time, parts of it appear and disappear, so that I forget about what is right in front of me when the focus is at a distance and then I rediscover it when it comes back into focus. The movie creates a spatial experience that is in a state of flux, I think this is how we actually experience space in our everyday lives.

PL: The smooth transitions between the stills produce a dream-like atmosphere that draws me in. As the space keeps transforming, it brings forth this state of flux that you talk about, in a sense I start to move with the space. The film is very successful in building a potent spatial experience. What comes next now? Let's hear the feedback from the group during the midterm presentation and take it from there.



18 OCTOBER 2011

Group discussion with Cecilie Andersen, Maja Haanæs, and Synne Farstad

CA: I want to bring what I have learned from photographing into a three-dimensional spatial experience. So, I will work with depth as a series of planes that appear and disappear because of shifting focus. But I am not sure how to do this, whether I should make something that one looks into, like a box, or whether I should work with the space of the gallery itself. Do you have any suggestions?

PL: I believe that you should find a way to motivate the viewers of your artifact or your intervention to shift their focus between spatial planes in a natural way, so that you don't have to issue directions of use for your work. Try not to be didactic, the work should lead the viewer naturally into the experience so that he can make his own discoveries and learn by himself.

SF: I am reminded of this artwork where lines were drawn on different surfaces in a space and when seen from one specific spot they composed the outline of a chair. The viewer had to find the spot where the image came together. I am also reminded of the work of that artist Pavlina presented who worked with perspective corrections.

PL: Yes, the work of Jan Dibbets and anamorphic drawings are good references in this case. They emphasize the way that our vision works, how our perception is affected by this, and they activate the viewer in experiencing the work. You can use this work as a source of inspiration while designing your spatial artifact. I also encourage you to spend time in the gallery, thinking and visualizing how you can work with the elements there to bring forth your artifact.

25 OCTOBER 2011

Group discussion with Cecilie Andersen, Maja Haanæs, and Synne Farstad

CA: I have made some sketch models exploring my notion of space as a series of planes. I placed a sentence on different planes, I printed squares of increasing size on layers receding into space that form a chessboard pattern when seen from a certain angle, and I have also worked with outlined squares of equal size that inscribe the depth as they recede.

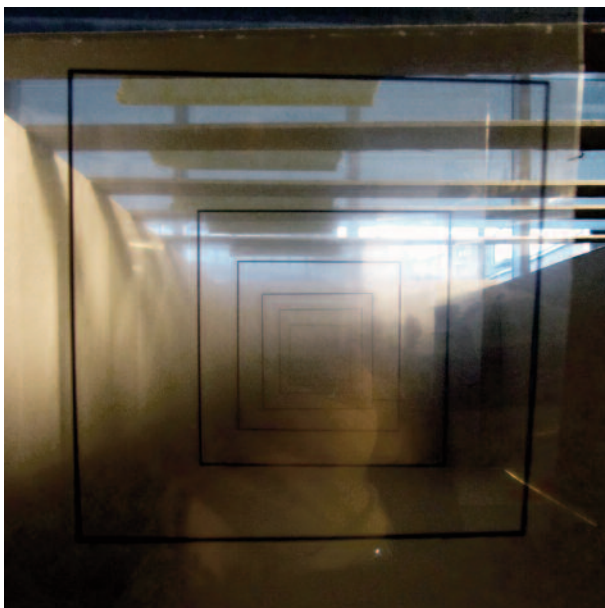
PL: Your models are a good first effort towards your aim of exposing spatial depth as a series of planes. In trying to find the "right" angle, one becomes aware of this composition of space out of layers. These models are successful in bringing into consciousness our act of "reading" space, showing that what we see is affected by how we see it.

MJ: It is also successful in activating and engaging the user to explore this space.

PL: Indeed. Now you need to think how you will proceed on a one-to-one scale.

CA: On the one-to-one scale the height of the person plays a big role in the experience, and so I'll have to take this into account when designing, especially if I work with lines.

PL: How we experience horizontal lines is of course affected by our eye height, while the perception of vertical lines is affected more by our lateral movement. Think about how you can work with the existing lines and layers in and around the gallery and how to expose spatial depth there through your intervention. In the next session we will discuss your ideas and experiments on-site.



11 NOVEMBER 2011

Imagine placing your hand very close to your eyes, focusing on this, and then shifting your focus to the distance. In this instant transition the hand falls out of focus and becomes imperceptible, its existence can be even forgotten until you focus back on it, making then the background indistinct.

If we think of spatial depth as composed out of a series of vertical planes receding in space, then the perception of this space is a function of the eye's capacity to shift focus between layers. This semester I worked with this notion of depth and I explored how spatial perception is affected by the capacity of our eyes to bring planes in and out of focus rendering them visible and invisible in the act.

• • •

My artifact is a diagonal line that exists on different planes of space inside and outside the gallery, and which is perceivable as one straight line from a specific point of view. The aim of this installation is to activate the viewer's body in search of the spot from where the red line appears uninterrupted. The eye negotiates the different layers by shifting focus back and forth between them so as to find the continuity of the line. In the process one becomes more aware of spatial depth as a series of layers and of the process by which the movement of our bodies and the mechanics of our vision affect our perception of what is seen.



ANN KARIN KILEN



30 AUGUST 2011

PL: What did you find potent here, what made you want to photograph this place?

AK: The color of the light. The mixture of daylight and artificial light. It gave me a feeling of lightness.

PL: Where does this feeling of lightness come from?

AK: From the way that the light comes into this space and the bluish tone of it. I did not experience this light as cold, normally blue light is perceived as cold, but in that moment I experienced it as comforting.

PL: How did this comfort feel?

AK: Light.

PL: Do you understand light as a noun or an adjective? Were you touched by the presence of light or by a feeling of lightness?

AK: It is more about a feeling and an atmosphere.

PL: So, the quality and color of light creates an atmosphere of lightness that is inviting and comforting...

AK: Yes.

PL: Then I would suggest that you continue observing and exploring photographically other spatial situations similar to this so as to understand better the interaction between the quality of light and the experience of lightness. Listen carefully to the dialog between light and lightness, between a physical phenomenon and a spatial experience.



06 SEPTEMBER 2011

AK: I explored mixed light conditions. When I was looking at the images afterwards the Norwegian word “oppløser” – which I think means “to dissolve” in English – came to my mind.

PL: What dissolves here?

AK: The lighter areas seem to dissolve, the darker areas are heavy and more materially present.

PL: Is this due to the intensity of light, or to the color of light? Does the proportion of one kind of light to another affect the space? Have you also found out something about the relation between light and lightness that we have talked about last time?

KA: No, I haven't. I see in these images that the materiality of the space becomes very prominent. They are more about the materials in the space than about light or lightness. Of course the two are related, the way that light is reflected depends in the quality of the materials in the space.

PL: You should explore further if and how a spatial atmosphere is affected by variations in light conditions. Look closer and learn through your photographic exploration, you cannot sit back and decide on this, you need to find it out empirically. Otherwise it is like sitting back and asking yourself how you want your life to be. I know that the task is challenging, sometimes you will find yourself in a dead-end and you will have to backtrack and re-begin.

KA: This is a good exercise for me, trying out things that I do not know. I meet this everyday in my eldest daughter, she is eight, and she is like me in that she doesn't want to try out things that she doesn't already know about. I asked her if she wanted to play football and she said “No, because I do not know how to play football, so I do not want to do that!” She needs to be in control.

PL: Yes, do not dominated your search, be open to new and unexpected findings. Go back to your original photograph and reflect on what touched you there, then explore this further with your camera. Print your images and put them up on the wall so that you can look at them all simultaneously, you will probably learn something from seeing them together at once. Maybe you should also look at the work of James Turrell and Dan Flavin, I will present this next week in class.





13 SEPTEMBER 2013

AK: I photographed the same space in different light conditions, seeing how the atmosphere changed. Today when you showed the work of Donald Judd I realized how edges can dissolve when light and material work together. This space also dissolves – I do not know if this is the right word – because of the presence of light. But there is not that lightness here which I had originally found, so I do not think that my search has been so successful. These images are more about the floor, how this is more or less present because of the light, and about contrast.

PL: When does light start to dissolve a surface? Doesn't this depend on the material itself. Judd used stainless steel. If he used another less reflective material, wood for example, the effect of light would have been entirely different.

AK: Yes, when I saw the work of Judd I was really fascinated with how surfaces melt into space. But I am really struggling to find my own direction, I am not quite sure what I am doing.

PL: The presence of overexposed areas in your first image could have had something to do with the atmosphere of lightness there. That image had a kind of kaleidoscopic quality. Have you gone back to explore that space further?

AK: No, I haven't. Even if there was perspective and a point of focus there, the elements of that space somehow melted together, the space was at the same time focused and diffused. I have not been able to recapture that sort of quality.

PL: Perhaps you should go back to that space and explore it further, maybe you can learn something more about why did it touch you then, or maybe you will find something else equally potent but different this time. You can also try to re-construct the atmosphere of that first image in a model, see what you can learn from this exercise. If your photographic exploration of existing spaces does not work for you, then it might be helpful to create spaces that you photograph. I am sorry that I can not be more helpful or specific...

AK: It must be really hard for you to be more specific because I am so lost...





20 SEPTEMBER 2011

AK: I went through my images again and decided to explore situations where a space loses its definition and appears different from what it actually is. I observed how borders dissolve, how spatial elements melt into each other and how materiality becomes ambivalent, by photographing this patio in our apartment.

PL: These images definitely have an atmosphere akin to your original image! What qualities make up this spatial ambivalence, this kind of lightness?

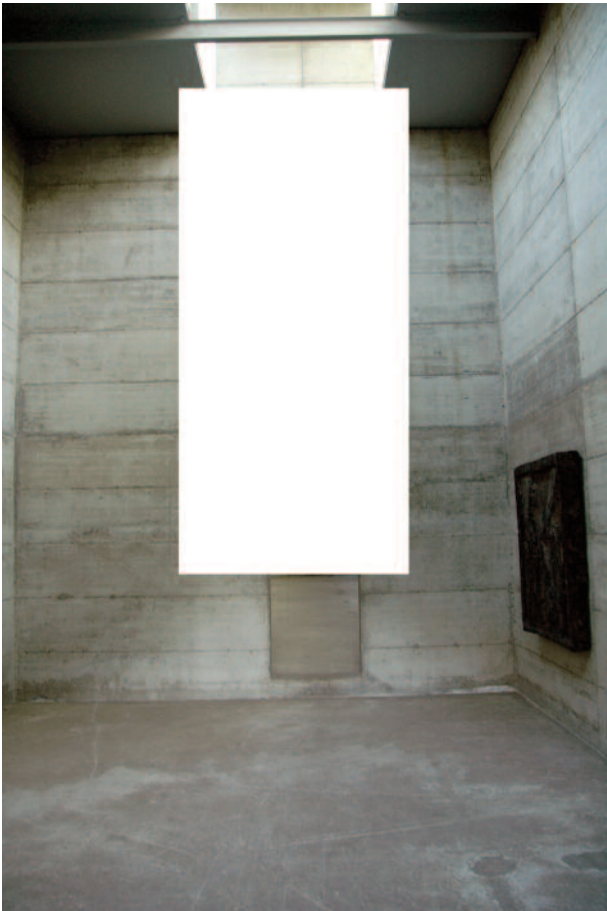
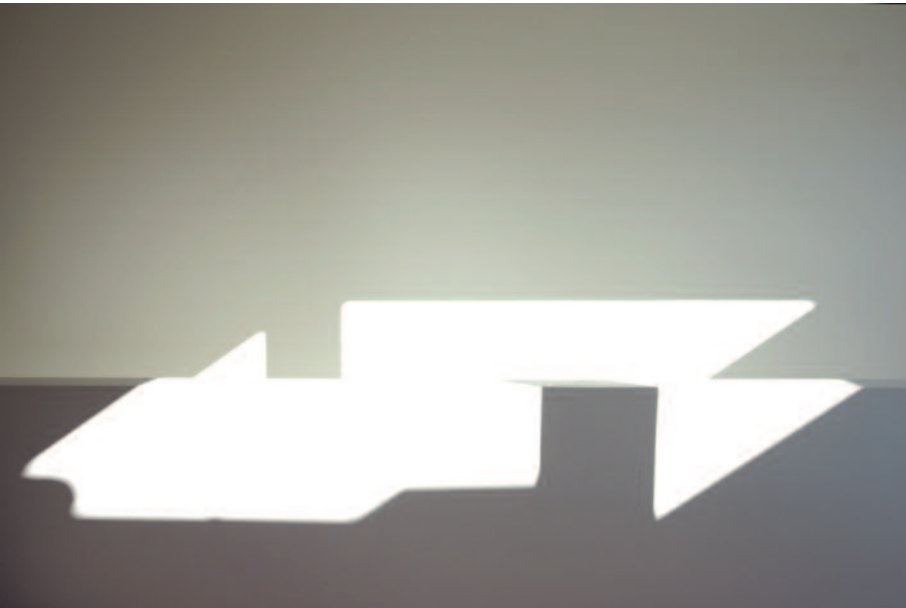
AK: Glass and light, and the way that these relate to each other... I took some notes yesterday on the first image and I wrote: blurry edges, color of light, reflections, repetitions, one room mirrors another room and they become part of each other. I will explore these elements further photographically and I will also write a text, writing has helped me a lot to clarify my thoughts.

PL: Not all of these elements are present here but still you have a similar sense of lightness. The patches of intense light create voids, areas that lack any definition, just like in your first image. I have showed you the work of Ed Ruscha, in some of his later paintings he inserted rectangles of flat color and these patches make the rest of the image all the more present and strong. The absence emphasizes what remains present. This is also a technique used in film and literature, what is left unshown/unsaid charges what is shown/said.

AK: This presence/absence makes sense to me, and I really do find my new work convincing.

PL: It is important that you believe in your work. But the dead-ends that you had previously encountered were part of finding your direction. You have now found a way to proceed and so I will not give you any further advice but let you go on with your exploration and see where this leads you. Our next meeting is in three weeks, because of the holidays and your trip, so you have plenty of time to experiment with this "burning out" of materials with light. The camera sensor has a much narrower latitude than our eyes, so your images will exaggerate these instances of voids created by intense light.







18 OCTOBER 2011

Group discussion with Sigrid Hansen, Joachim Haug, Ann Karin Kilen, and Sebastian Stokkebokjær

AK: After exploring photographically how intense light produces spatial voids, I experimented with inserting blank areas of different proportions in images to see how erasing part of a space affects my perception of that space.

JH: Are you thinking of blanking out an area in the gallery?

AK: Yes, by inserting elements, or shining light, or something..

SH: Shining intense light on a reflective surface maybe..

PL: So far you have been working on a flat plane, but when you intervene in a space your work will be seen from different points of view. So you have to think how to create this sort of abstraction in three dimensions.

SH: Yes, whatever you do will become part of the room, instead of erasing the room like you have done in these collages.

PL: Here you are affecting the image of the space but not the space itself. This work has been a crucial step in your process, but now you need to carry this exploration into three-dimensional space.

AK: I have been thinking of using mirrors.

SS: Are you trying to replace or displace elements in space?

SH: I imagine how placing a mirror on a column will interrupt and displace it. I think that working with an architectural element, like a column or a corner, will be more effective than inserting something in the middle of the room.

AK: Yes, I like the idea of working with a spatial element, rather than placing something in the middle of the space.

PL: A column is a structural element and challenging its presence can have a strong impact on the space. The columns of the Barcelona Pavilion come to my mind now. An abstraction sets the materials around it against its blankness and charges their presence. The little imperfections, the textures, the colors, come to life when juxtaposed with an abstract surface. By erasing part of something you make the rest of that something more alive. I want to bring up what Børre Skodvin said during the midterm presentation – that what we are doing here is building tools that can be used in the design of architecture. Working in these small groups you can think together about these tools that you are developing both for the present task and for your future as architects.

SH: It is nice that we are all working with very different themes, so there is no competition between us.

PL: But even if you worked on the same theme your projects would still be different, because you are all different individuals.



11 NOVEMBER 2011

1. The first photographic impulse

In my first photograph I capture a feeling of spatial lightness and then I tried to find the elements that composed that atmosphere:

- color of light
- reflections
- repetition
- shifting focus
- mixture of light
- diffusion of edges
- spatial ambiguity

2. Light and lightness

For the next two sessions I explored this atmosphere of lightness by photographing mixed light situations but I did not learn something that could take me further and I felt quite lost.

3. Voids

For the fourth session I photographed reflections in an enclosed glass patio. In these images I saw that patches of intense light remove definition and appear as voids.

4. Lack of definition and absence of information

I continued photographing instances where intense light erased material articulation. In the process I found that these voids intensified my act of seeing and strengthened my perception of the materials around them. I explored this phenomenon by inserting blank rectangles or cutting out parts from my images and observing how this affected what remained visible.

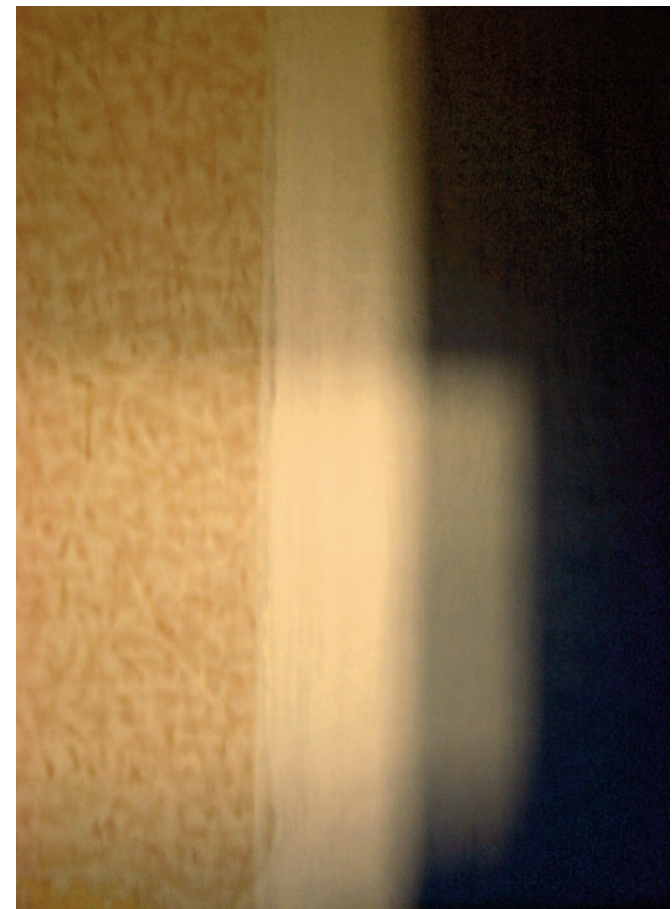
5. The spatial artifact

While making my spatial artifact I continued to experiment with the selective removal of material articulation, monitoring how my interventions affected the space around them. I settled on masking part of a column with a sheet of steel. The abstract metal surface startles and highlights the presence of the rough concrete.



HEDVIG STEINSVÅG HANSEN





12 NOVEMBER 2010

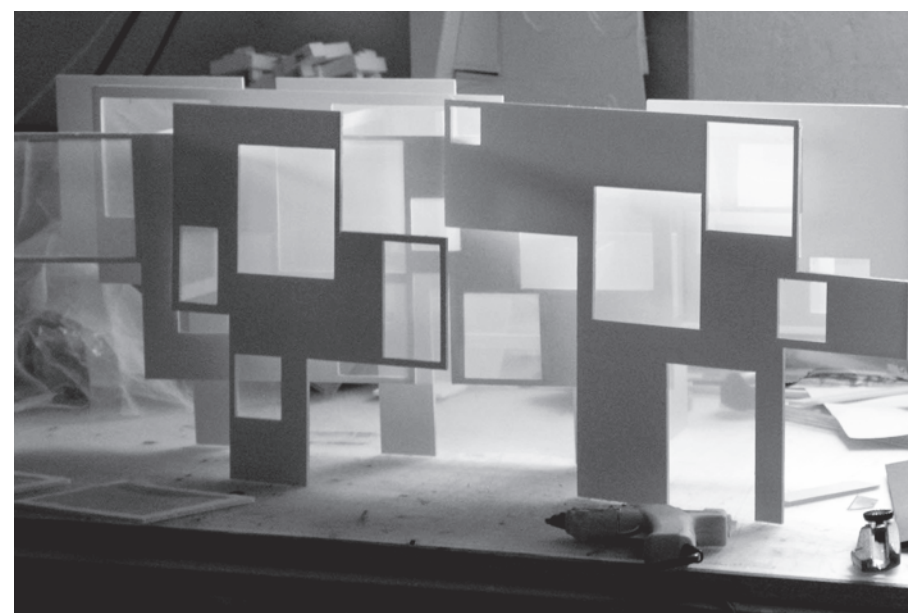
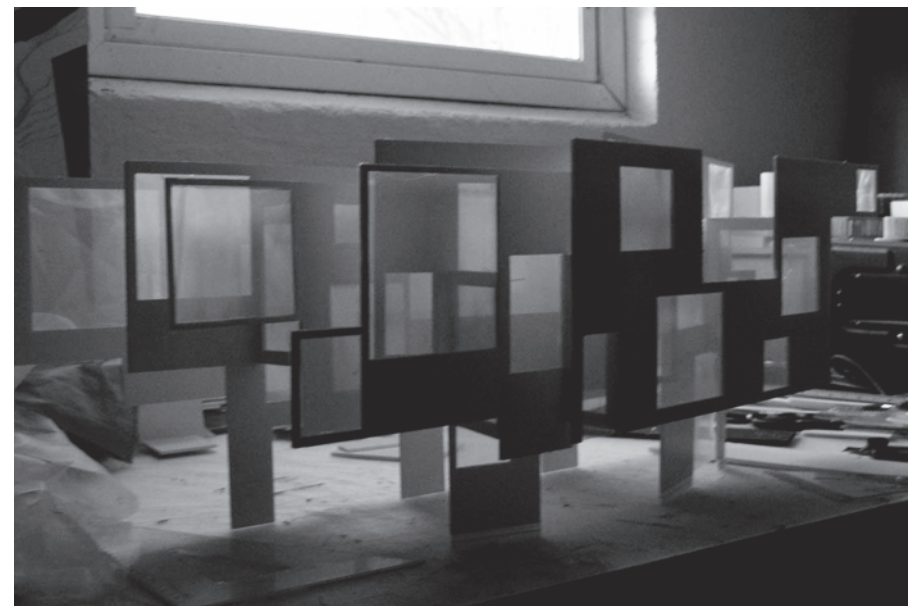
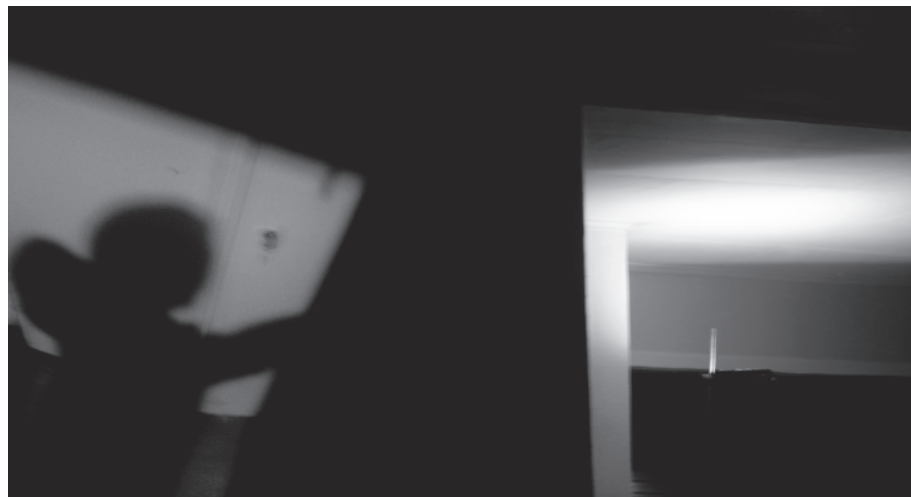
On a bright morning the rays of sun play with the metal roof across my room. My walls come to life once again. Light finds its way through my apartment, reflecting, bouncing from wall to wall, and fading out the darkness in the hallway. Sharp edges blur out. Streaks of light slip through the darkness, revealing new layers and depth, and the dust that I have left undisturbed for far too long.

In the frozen moment of a new morning, sunlight cuts through my room, claiming whatever it touches, cutting through mass, erasing surfaces and textures, revealing new depths, and creating a spatial ambiguity. Light starts telling the story of a place, the entirety of which I cannot fathom.



OLE ALEKSANDER LARSEN





12 NOVEMBER 2010

Beyond the Threshold: Reflections on a Sensuous Void

I photographed in my home, looking, following my intuition.
I explored the contrasts and moods between light and darkness.

I was fascinated by the reflections and the shadows,
and the disorienting and surreal effects they produce.

In many of my photographs, I attempted to create
a cinematic tension, the experience of an onlooker.

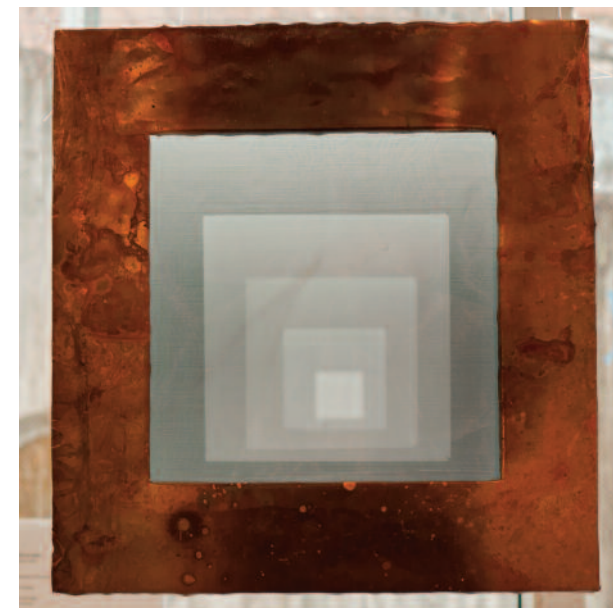
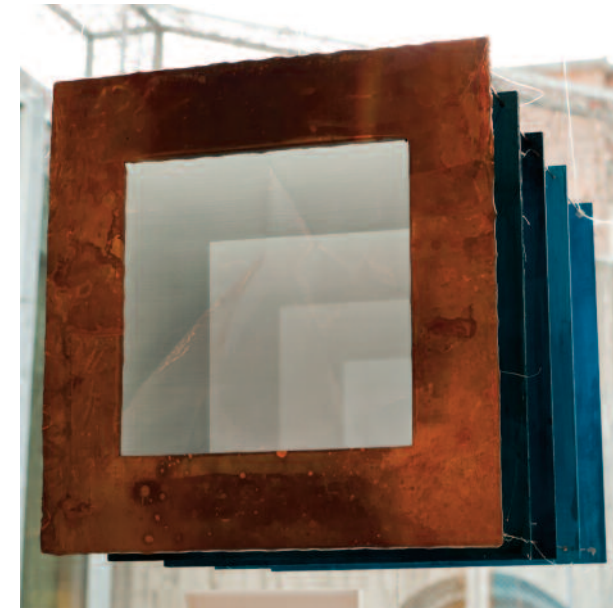
Seeking an architectural generator through photographing,
I explored my fascination with thresholds and the distance beyond.

A distance perceived either directly,
as an infinite void between light and darkness,
or indirectly, as the surmise of a hidden faraway.

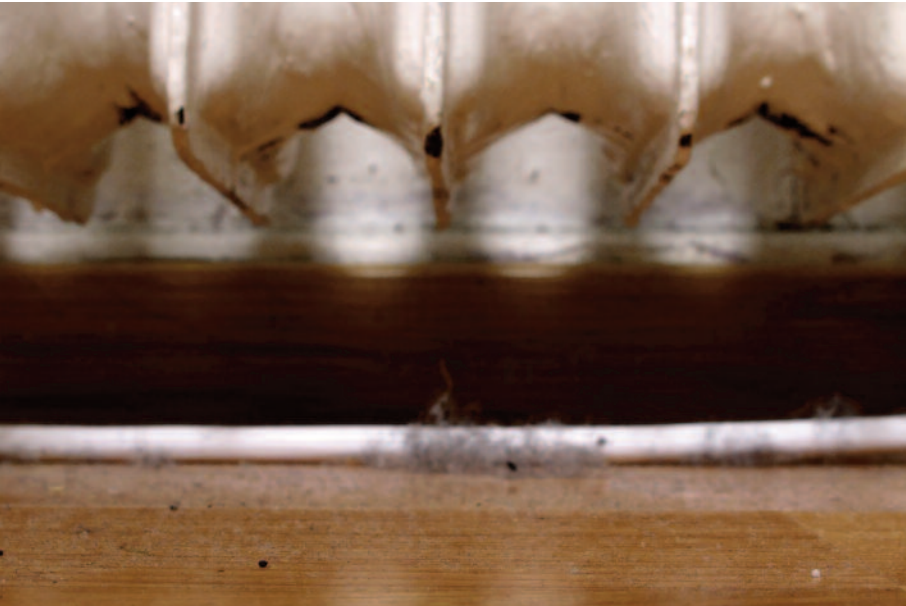
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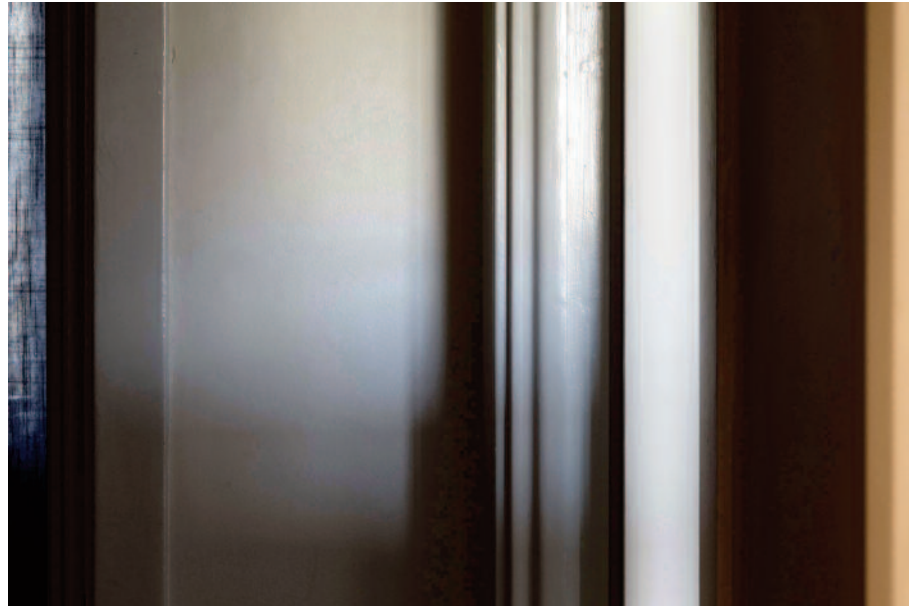
My artifact is a sequence of light-filtering surfaces
creating the experience of distance,
a great expanse of light and air
within a constrained physical reality.

In distance lies great freedom,
in light resides calm longing.
Darkness sustains the lost light,
the shadows, and its tension.
My visual world is slowly dissolving.
In these soft contrasts I find peace.



ØYVIND PHARO ODDEN





12 NOVEMBER 2010

We are always connected to our physical surroundings.
Standing on a carpet, sitting in a sofa, or leaning against a wall.

The camera extracts a fragment of spatial experience each time.
A photographic image with a narrow depth of field
isolates parts of space where I focus my perception.
But my physical exploration of a space brings together
all the senses in a more corporeal experience.

A physical exploration happens as a dynamic sequence that unfolds
space in time, like a series of photos with a narrow depth of field.
We are not able to establish or maintain a physical
connection to more than one plane at a time.

As we move, what was far/then, an abstract impression, becomes
near/now; what was previously an abstraction becomes our reality.

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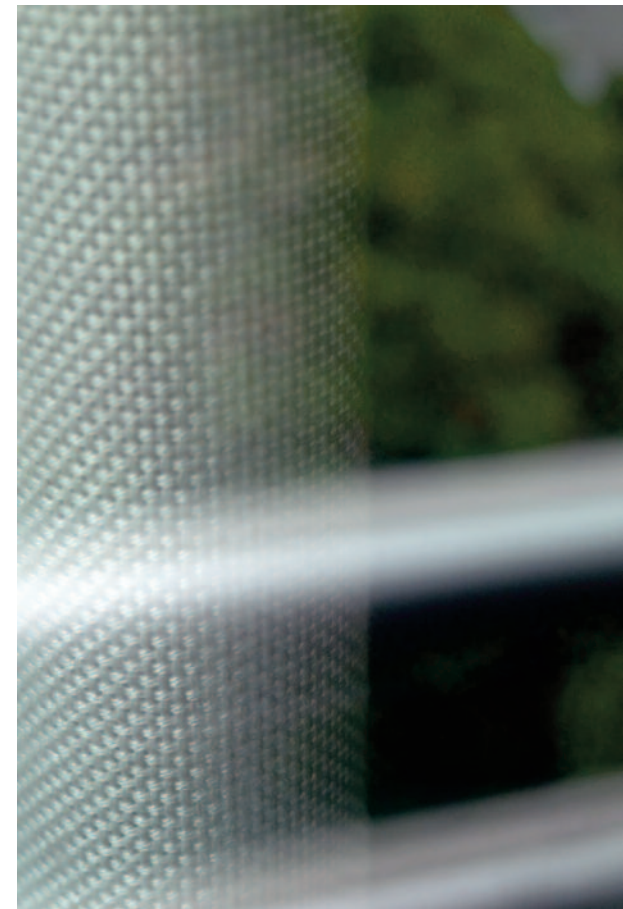
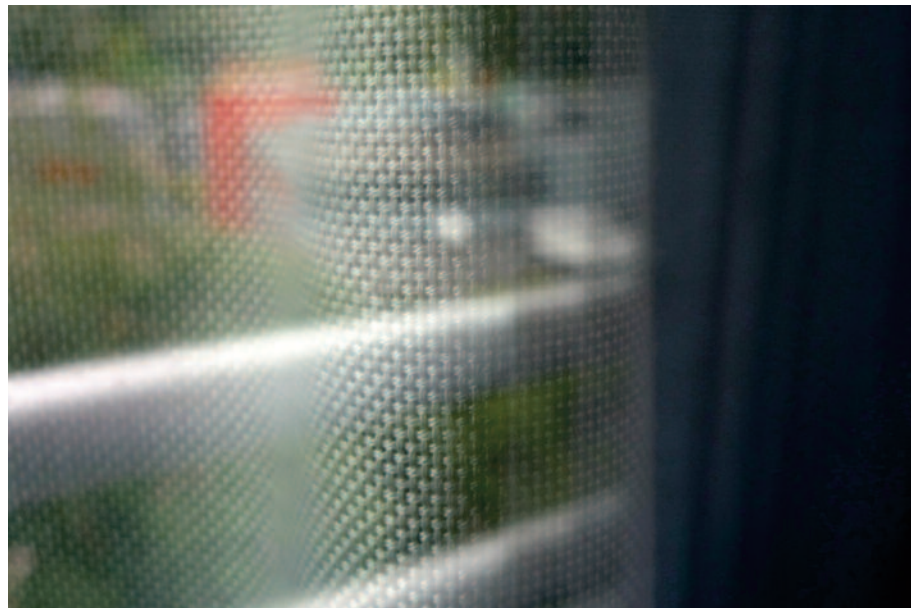
I hung a piece of thick rubber from the ceiling using metal wire.
This material is simultaneously light, because of its flexibility,
and heavy, because of its weight, its color.

From a distance, it appears as an abstract rectangular shape.
Experienced from up-close, it marks a territory around it through
its smell and texture, and encloses a mysterious space within it.





WING YI HUI





12 NOVEMBER 2010

CONDENSING THE EVAPORATED

object and space meet and converse in their own manners,
one reveals the other,
one contains the other,
one transforms the other,
to an existence, a being in reality,
waiting to be released at the moment when man perceives them,
man dives into this poetic meeting through the body and mind,
a new totality is constructed, elaborated in fleeting moments,
each second is a new dimension for man, object, and space.
in photographing this meeting I comprehend,
i perceive, the encounter between them.

. . .

two planes in space turn themselves upon the slightest movement of air,
a man comes and moves between the planes, in search of a dialogue,
his body brushes through with an urge to feel with all his senses,
a simple story begins just like this:

the air charges the paper,
the paper touches the man,
the man moves the paper,
the paper moves the air,
and the cycle goes on and on.



FINAL EXHIBITION | AHO GALLERY

12 - 21 NOVEMBER 2010



