



TOUCHING
BEING
TOUCHED
BY ART

A project by the Micro-Phenomenology Lab



TOUCHING/BEING TOUCHED BY ART

A collaborative micro-phenomenological enquiry
into the experience of Olafur Eliasson's artworks

During a one-week workshop (26-30 September 2016), eighteen researchers trained in micro-phenomenological methods visited the exhibition of Olafur Eliasson in the chateau and park of Versailles (June-September 2016), and then made micro-phenomenological descriptions of particularly significant moments of this visit that resulted in this document. In order to preserve the private character of the micro-phenomenological descriptions, the texts are signed with borrowed first names.

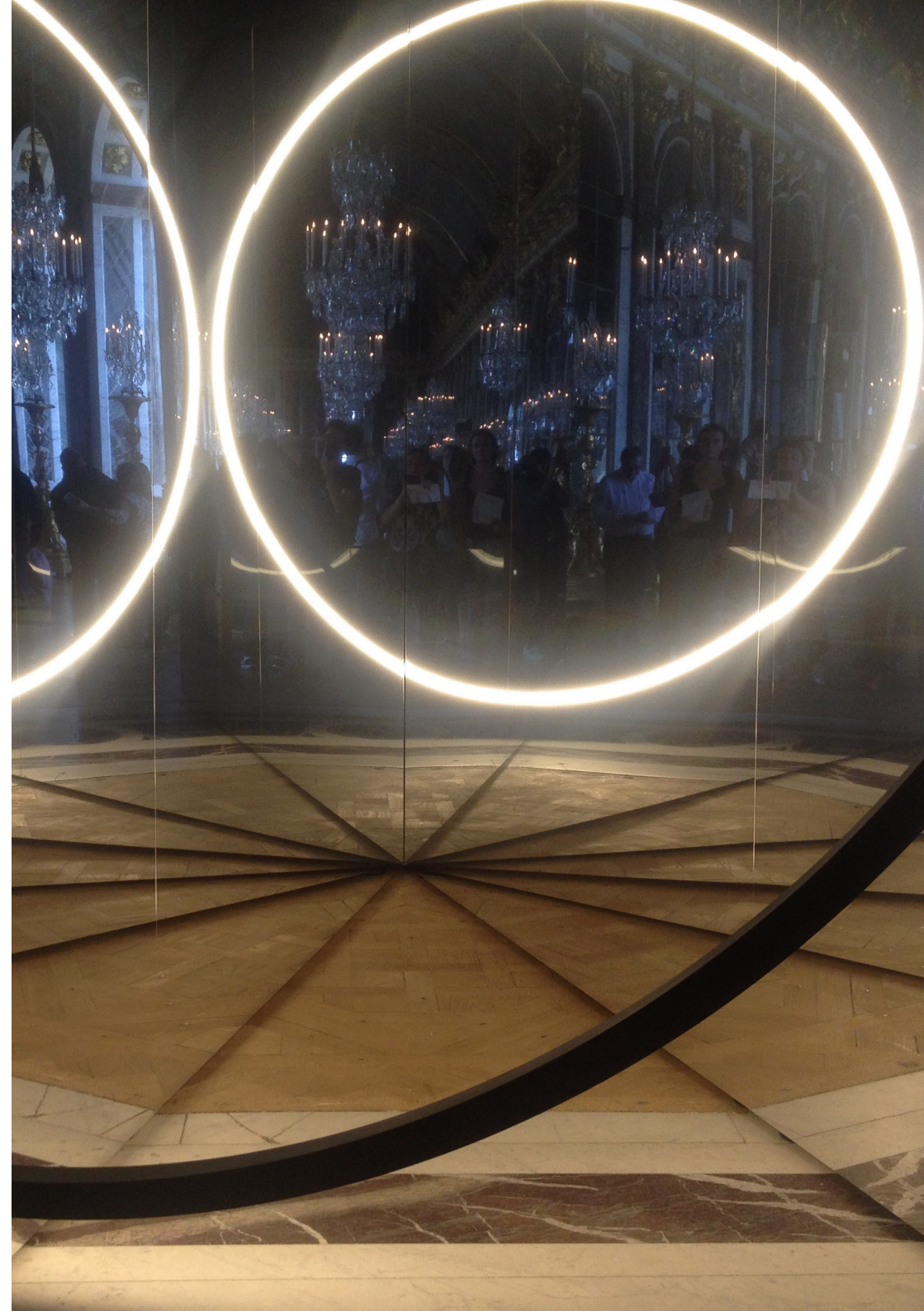
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Document layout by Bruna Petreca.

YOUR SENSE OF UNITY



Your sense of unity

by Donatella

Pre-experience

Approaching the artwork at the end of the corridor, I noticed a sense of confusion, also a sense of curiosity, not being able to make sense of what I see. (How did I notice that?) It was like seeing lots of different parts, no unity. A feeling in my head going down to my stomach; I am not really in the perception ...not understanding ...not a full sense of space...or maybe place. At the same time there was a sense of enjoyment, an interest in not knowing plus a very slight, but also pleasurable drive in wanting to find out, what this was. There was an implicit hope, that this sense of not-knowing what this is, will not dissolve too quickly. A slight fogginess or slight strain in the eye, but a kind of promising fogginess, implicitly knowing there is something there to recognize, hoping simultaneously that this state of uncertainty will remain a little longer.

Experiencing

I moved closer to the artwork, standing in the centre before it, next to me many people, who I ignored, I tried to make sense of what it was that I see: another room? What kind of reflection, what was reflecting what, what kind of space was this? I looked at the floor very closely, and the lines on the floor, I looked at the circles, back and forth, and all of a sudden I understood the set-up: 2 mirrors, in an angle, half circle in black... the sense of curiosity was stilled. At the same time the experience got flatter.

Continuing to look, something happened, only then did I see the reflections, I saw us standing there, looking... a kind of "awe", enjoyment, new opening of the experience. How did I know it was enjoyment: not only enjoyment of understanding, but seeing what the piece of art does? A real experience of opening up (not just some perceptual trick). Only then did I see that the scene I see is reflected several times, always a little different. New amazement.

I go on and on to explore, from reflection to reflection, a sense of exploration is awakened, but not rational, rather delightful, wanting to see it all, wanting to experience how this changes with fewer people, how it always changes. (How do you know that it was delightful?) Like a feeling in the throat: wanting to drink more, wanting to take more in...

Enjoyment (after the artwork opened up this new space of experience): cloudlike, subtle sense in and around heart-area, warmth. Implicit sense of joy in what ideas can do, in opening up a new space of community, sense of celebrating us looking, us there, a totally different feeling and experience in comparison to before, walking in these heavy loaded rooms in which humans have reached a peak in taking themselves too seriously (and all others, subservients, subordinates, so utterly not serious).

In the enjoyment is a clear and surprising sense of relation to the artist, kind of thankfulness, kind of response as if one got a present: this piece of art does something for us, something happening for us, opening up a new, surprising richer space of experience. Implicit in the enjoyment: this is so clever! With these two mirrors, and half circle, opening up the space... so that something utterly new was happening. Implicit is a kind of sense of how difficult it is to do something substantial, that takes many steps to take in and then opens up into something so worthwhile, surprising, of which you want to see more and more.



Your sense of unity

by Teresa

There are so many things going on here.

I am looking at the floor, and found something stable, seeing the figures of a full circle between two parallel lines, all in white. I am trying to match these figures to the structure of the installation, which was the negative, all in black, but also formed of circles and lines.

I am following these lines and then I notice the shape of a hand fan, and I start to contour it. I remember other fans I have, an orange and a black one, then the green one on my sister's dance. I had to move a little bit, to be able to continue following the fan shape, following the outline, and as I do it, I suddenly see myself mirrored. I got hot, and felt self-conscious. I don't want to look at myself.

Then through the mirror I look back, I look up and see the reflection of a circle made of light. In fact, I notice that it is forming many circles, maybe six, but that the external structure, outside the mirror, is actually only a half circle, black on the outside and with light inside. The reflection of it forms these floating circles. And it actually creates another space. As I look at the circles only, it feels like I'm inside this space. In there, there are only these circles. Floating or somehow suspended. Then I move to see what happens when I change perspective, trying to understand that kaleidoscope that I am inside. But as I move, it becomes only a half circle again, the one that looks like a fan, but now I see it from the other side. When I see this, I feel that I have completed the experience, and I walk away.

Your sense of unity

by Elaine

Pre-experience

I enter the hall, and am drawn to the mirrors at the far end. My first inclination as I approach is to wonder about the structure. How much space is behind? How much actually constructed, how much created visually? And I spend considerable time doing so, even looking behind the structure. But then I turn to the project of myself in relationship to the installation.

Experiencing

Where am I? It is difficult to locate myself in the crowd. In fact the initial recognition is tentative. The location and source of reflection are not easy to find. There are glimpses of a person wearing similar clothes. Could that be me? I don't think so, but, then, it must be. The first reaction to recognition is a very subtle level of pushing away, then a checking in with myself. Does that image match my sense of my self? Yes, my sleeve, my arm, look right. Otherwise there is not much correspondence between the visual image and what I know of my self: my inner experience, experience of body from the inside, the fullness and vitality of experience. I am happy and light, interested, excited, delighted even, happy. I feel connected to other people. But the visual image does not reflect this. She, me from the outside, me as third person, Elaine, does not look very happy or very connected. There is a clear separation between the image in the mirror and the felt sense of me.

Post-experience

The outcome of this mismatch is a different approach to later installations. I am less interested in my visual image, appearance, or presence of others, and turn back in to my experiential self, not necessarily even identified as a person, but a body and consciousness navigating the space. The images reflected in the mirrors, which I now perceive more kindly, do not otherwise interest me.

I turn instead to interaction and relationship with the other installations.



Your sense of unity

by Martin

Pre-experience

Versailles ... the Hall of Mirrors ... At the far end of the room gold and mirrors but intriguingly modern. Surprised by that. The light is like the gold leaf and paint that has been an insistent pulse from our first approach - from gazing at the palace from the courtyard, then room after room. As I approach, the mirrors shimmer, like the water in the gardens. The artwork belongs: gold and water; and, the artwork disturbs: modern, not quite brash. Entering in with curiosity is central to my experiencing.

Experiencing

The something intriguing at the end of the room resolves into a complex space. I am on the periphery, looking out on a community of people. Friends, and strangers whom I feel friendly with as well. There are many of us, in two senses: many people, and many images of many of the people I can see. Delight kind of came over me ... like an upwelling ... delight in the recognizing the multiplicity of us. Quiet wordless delight.

From the edge of the work I see only one of me. Unity is simple: My unity is being one with, in, us all. I realize I will see many of me if I move to the centre, so I wait for a space to open up. It does. The mirrors are, create, a space ... what arises in the spaces is mostly fluid, circumstantial ... except – it's us. My looking is quite active: looking for patterns, repetitions ... for friends. And then eventually for myself. I see myself again and again; I am overwhelmed by seeing me, many of me. At a certain point, my looking collapses. Overwhelmed, I think, by finding me everywhere ... I captured my attention, uncomfortably: drawn again and again to seeing me: figure on the ground of our community. But I collapse and I stop seeing - literally - and start puzzling. For a moment ... maybe thirty seconds ... I am seeing nothing at all: I am inward, puzzling: how does this work? I return to the room. Notionally. In fact I return to a vastly different space, as I am looking analytically.

Puzzling hard - looking with sharply delineated rather than soft eyes - at the architectural engineering. Looking for leverage, and grasping at the texture of the wooden floor to understand how the piece was put together.

I follow the floor in and see a wedge. And then two mirrors. And then a single arc. And then I can see the whole mirror spaces, the whole mirror world, coming into being.

I feel quietly happy - in a 'solving a math puzzle' kind of way!

I feel the gladness of that, and the bitterness of having abandoned (escaped?), Delight... and perhaps having had that collapse on me, overwhelmed by myself.

Then another upwelling of gladness. I realize I am standing in a kaleidoscope. I am one of the glass pieces shuffled at the bottom, making delightful patterns. My grandfather made us lovely toys when I was small, many of them kaleidoscopes. I am reminded of my grandfather's love. Very glad to be here; in another way.

Three spaces: mirror space; no eyes space; engineering space (the room in an ordinary way).

Three spaces: Delight; fear and puzzlement?; a craftsman's satisfaction.

Three spaces: At one; then in retreat; then unpuzzled.

Three spaces made by: relaxing into space; puzzling, questioning; seeing, analyzing.

I appreciate the wisdom in letting thinking and delight become one.

Post-experience

Writing notes, delving in, heeding my experience: an auto-elicitation student practicing my craft. Savoring the delight I felt, feeling its echo, taste, in my being, as a light, softly finely bubbling joy. Gladness. Thanks.

Your sense of unity

by Rosa

I queue up and arrive from the right of the artwork.

It really starts when I read the title. It stays in my head throughout the experience. I hear it in a sarcastic tone. It is sarcastic because I can't find any sense of unity with all these selfie sticks. I hear it coming from the right, because the card (cardboard with the title) is just on my right. The "your" is particularly resonating. The "your" apostrophizes me (or shouts at?). "Apostrophizes" is really the good word. The "your" also makes my stomach hurt. At the same moment I see the yellow circles. The circles also make my stomach hurt. Suddenly I see me. I am pouting. I don't recognize myself. I still feel my stomach hurting. Others' faces are strange too. These two sensations, the auditory one on the right of my brain and the stomach hurting, are erasing all the rest. I feel as if one wanted to make fun of us, by holding up a mirror and talking about "your sense of unity" in such a touristic place. I feel as if this idea of one making fun of me was the reason why my stomach hurts me. I am in a rush to leave because of the others' presence.

I go away but I still watch the others in front of the artwork.

Your sense of unity

by Carol

Writing up my notes after the first piece of art (Your sense of unity). Looked up, noticing the tourists passing by, noticing us writing our notes.

Having a feeling of trust, just trusting.

It takes my attention down to the stomach. Then awareness rises. It feels as though I were looking down, I would be looking up. It feels like my spine gets more straight and my gaze is looking out. And this sense of trust goes on mostly in the area of my stomach and in my chest. It makes me turn towards the outside. It's like my awareness can reach outside myself.

I become aware in a very open manner. I am ready for contact.

I noticed a Chinese woman, who looked at us. Then she looked at me, and then she saw I was looking at her. And then we smiled and she said something I didn't recognise. I was so amused, because we were both aware that we were aware of each other.

Trusting the experience: This sensation is rooting itself downward. Like trees are having roots, or like sensing that there is something (like ground). The trust is rooted, it is a sensation.

I trust the experience, actually trusting the openness. It is a huge relief. I am not trusting in anything (like a greater power).

I am trusting it. This experience.

Your sense of unity

by Lise

My gaze hesitates between trying to see, to understand how, through which play of mirrors the effect is produced, and “entering the mirror”, the space that opens, without asking any questions, marveling at this trembling transparency, at the candles whose flames seem to flicker as if the mirrors gave life to them. This transparency resembling the transparency of consciousness.

In the first case I look at the mirrors themselves, at their edges that meet the ground and between each other. I look at them as mirrors. I try to understand what is at stake in this strange arrangement.

And then I drop that. I look at the space that appears in the mirror, in the mirror background. I look at it globally without focusing on any specific details. I look further than the mirror surface, deeper into space, but not at the objects that are reflected. I look at space itself. It's a small adjustment of the gaze. That space is much more open. The edges disappear. I forget them. There is only one space which is not kaleidoscopic any more, not broken in parts but a whole space.

I enter that space, go behind the mirror and visit that space. I am interested in the quality of that space. That space is vibrating, shivering, transparent. There is a sort of density, of texture of that space, which is very different from the space behind me. The space behind me is empty, even if it is full of people and rich paintings. While behind the mirror, space is denser, and things are part of that space, there is no separation between space, and objects in space. Objects are not in space, they have the same texture as space, they are space. There is a density but a very light one. Behind me it is more flat. Flat, empty and there are things and people moving in that space.

The space of the mirror attracts me. I catch myself wanting to immerse into it. It is softer, less rigid, less geometric. It is not a geometrical space with lines. The limits are blurred. There is a deepness which is not in the space behind.

When I feel the space behind I am an object in that space. I feel separate from it. I feel somewhere in the Galerie des Glaces, behind me. When I look in the mirror space, the feeling is different. As it is a dense space, there is less separation between my bodily space or texture, and the texture of that space. I cannot say that there is no separation but the boundary weakens. It is as if I was able to go there. I have the feeling I could go. Just afterwards I walked with Jacques outside the Galerie des Glaces to discover the next art piece. I told him that I would like to go into that space. He said: “Oh yes, but it is in your imagination”. And I was a little shocked, I said to myself: “No, it's not in my imagination, I can go there.”

I am attracted by these little candles, by the beauty of the crystal chandelier. That space is vibrant, it's as if there is a little movement inside. I don't know how this is possible technically, but I don't care. It's as if the mirrors were moving very, very slightly, were shivering. For me it is not the mirror but the space behind that is shivering. And the candles are shivering too. Real fire is not static, it moves a little. At a moment I turn back to verify if the real candles are shivering, but no, there are only very straight and still and vertical electric lines, that do not move at all, much less interesting than those in the mirror. I am surprised.

The crystal chandeliers and the candles are not objects in space, they are made of that space. They have the same quality of that space that is dense, shivering, vibrating, with a sort of luminous transparency, they are made of that element. All objects are made of this same texture. They have no solidity.

That space in the mirror is more like a space of consciousness. It's very similar to what happens sometimes when I am meditating, or when I walk in the forest and suddenly there is this transparency. There is not me and the space. The space between becomes denser, and there is transparency everywhere. This reminds me of that experience. It's as if this artwork drew my attention towards the fact that all this is only consciousness. It makes it more obvious that experience is consciousness, and all that we experience is nothing else but consciousness. And when I turn back, the usual things are there again: my little consciousness in my head, solid, and separate objects out there, far from me.

I wanted to go into it. I had the feeling that I could go into that space, when I want. It is not a very strange experience, that you can only live when you visit Olafur's exhibitions, it just drew my attention towards something that is there any time.

I was about to go there. I was almost in the space. While behind me I was separated. I was at the border. In the mirror space I'm not there, my position is not clear, I'm lost, not completely lost but almost. And when I feel the space in my back I am there, at a specific position in that space.

Your sense of unity

by Lisa

Wonderment over being there and touched. Cannot quite comprehend or make sense. It becomes round. Round in the body as if it pulls the roundness inside of myself. The possibility to become round. "Forces" me to follow the roundness. There is much life in the roundness. The friends (course participants) in many copies (several images of the same person). I am also there, in front and behind and it makes me feel like being all over. Several new people (visitors in the museum) are also there being curious. Their heads watching movement as if they are discovering. A sort of openness that is visible in the pattern of movement, it is like something else has taken over, they move with an experience, they are not only closed and filled with themselves. It feels like an interaction and it becomes something we do together.

All of a sudden all energy is drained (happened in real time but until going back to the second round of auto elicitation I was only aware of the feeling of "energy loss"). Going back in to the feeling of energy draining / It feels heavy black and isolating it is hopeless and powerless. I can feel it in the whole body. I have sentences in my head like I cannot do anything and Nobody wants me. Father left me ... I feel closed down. Could not do anything. He is leaving a big, black, stiff piece. on the left body side. The sense of belonging is gone, the belonging feeling with the course- and museum- participants in the mirror. It feels like I am closed down. He took it with him. It is physical. Because it is something physical that left when he left and I feel it in my body. Nobody understood. He took IT with him - Unity

Reflections

Entering the museum and the experience with myself and with everyone in our group, was one of full openness. Like that I approached Your sense of unity and in that open state I felt a strong sense of unity, taking in the art piece. All of a sudden energy just left and my whole body felt drained. I moved on to the other remaining pieces.

Through the auto-elicitation I could go back to my experience, feeling the round unity and when I came to the part where I felt energy-drain I looked deeper. It became connected to my father and him leaving me at the age of 3-4 and him “taking away” the sense of unity, leaving a non-unity sensation in the body.

Working/feeling more of this experience I have understood how a deep sense of unity - my father and I had a warm relationship until he left - also was very deeply rooted and connected to my experience of non-unity. The piece of art evoked that sense in me and gave me a very physical experience. The auto-elicitation made it possible for me to recognize and understand, without that it would still be pre-reflective.

In real time, in the museum, viewing the following pieces had importance for me. The Solar Compression gave me ease and regaining of energy.



Your sense of unity

by Annila

Pre Experience

For me the event begins as I approach the Palace. As soon as I encounter its full breadth in front of me, I feel it hits me, a very clear force-field that feels like a rectangle pressing in across the top of my chest, about two inches high, about 15 inches long. I have some interest to approach the structure, and in any case we have already decided we will go there, but in this moment I feel stopped in my approach, as if some force is pushing against me. I am a little awed (but not delighted). Almost immediately I instinctively push back against this force, galvanized by a new force of my own. I feel fortified. (An unintended pun, but I realize I do see this edifice as a fortress, an expression of power.)

We walk toward, wait for a while outside to organize the tickets, and then enter as a group. Soon though I am walking as if by myself along the first great corridor, looking out to the horizontally organized gardens. I find I am curious. What would it be like to walk these halls as if you lived here, as if you owned them. As I wonder, I feel my body experimenting, inquiring, it might feel like this, that my stride is a little longer, more swinging out from the hips, my upper torso extended a little. This is my nascent felt sense of belonging to a building like this.

Then I turn down the hall of mirrors. My mind feels sparkly, almost gently lit itself by the shimmering chandeliers. I feel the entire space as clean and clear. I forget about embodying ownership and feel the beginnings of delight. This delight grows as I move through the space. Cognitively I remember hearing this room described as very ornate, but I experience it as simple, the repetition of chandeliers, windows, light, it brightens me. As I pass about the halfway point, I notice my growing curiosity. If previously I was striding, or imagining, like a powerful adult, now I am a softer presence, more childlike, open, interested. And I turn the corner to the left and enter the grand room.

The Experience Dawning

The grand room as such doesn't interest me, except for a quick glance to the left, at some large portrait; I don't look at the walls, but I have a sense of enormous ornamentation in the room. Mainly I'm aware of my own growing sense of wonder, curiosity. For me the experience begins here. What on earth would an artist place at the far end of such a room? The wondering feels pleasant. In retrospect, while being interviewed, I feel that underneath this wonder was also a very subtle readiness to recoil, pulling back from having to experience yet more ornamentation at the hands of Olafur Eliasson, whose work I don't know. But my strongest felt sense is wonder. What will it be? This wondering is pleasurable, open, relaxed, and youthful.

I can tell I am getting closer to The Work, but the crowd prevents me from seeing it. Then I approach perhaps 12 feet away on the far right, crowds still blocking most of my view, and I catch sight of what seems to be a translucency. Instantly the words "of course" and "natural" arise in my mind. It could only be like this! Reflecting further on this during the interview, I see that in that moment I feel welcomed, not assaulted by yet another "object" or forced to look at something, as I had implicitly feared. My body feels a subtle relief that I will not be constrained by whatever it is I'm about to see but rather that something very natural is being offered, not a work of contrivance or interference.

Also in this first moment of encounter I have a feeling of rightness: That it is complete. As soon as I saw it, I felt Yes. That it is just natural that it should arise there, almost like without the contrivance of an artistic mind. I hadn't yet seen the circular mirrors. I simply got that there was something translucent there. It opened a space. Already I could feel the space opening. That seemed very appropriate. It just felt nice. Not yet another complicated thing in the room.

The Core Experience

And finally I am standing behind just a few rows of people. I see the wide mirroring, especially, the upper part. My main sensation is of expansiveness. My mind expands in every direction, but especially behind me, as I look ahead, clearly seeing the great room at my back right before my eyes. My energy expands. (In the interview I realize) that this expansiveness seems to relieve me of a sense of compression, or density, that is like a large roundish, possibly iron-like form, the bottom curve of it coming just below my heart, and filling most of my chest.

I find the dissolving of this density very enjoyable. It is as if I'm drinking in a kind of atmospheric elixir, an ethereal flow that sustains or is perhaps itself the substance of my expansive sensation. I continue to thoroughly enjoy the unusual experience of clearly seeing what is behind me. I don't feel that I am just seeing it in a mirror, I feel my mind-energy is naturally as present behind me as it is in front. I lose a sense of the one-way directionality of most perception, subjectivity an arrow headed toward an object.

Now it is an open space, and my perception, though in a sense emerging from where my body is in the room, in another sense erases that localization. My attentional field does not narrow or wrap itself around, much less grasp at, some object, as is usually the case. My attention is a field, and it is more like space than mind, or something like awareness-space.

I felt my whole mind - whatever mind is - as this expansiveness. It wasn't just that the room was big, my attentional dimension was big, dimensional. That was what was expanded, I was expansive and I enjoyed that. I inquired a little into how that felt and noticed that I didn't feel disembodied, but I didn't feel particularly obviously grounded, though not ungrounded either, just kind of there. My sense of enjoyment was partly emotional, in a subtle way physical, an energetic opening. Very simple, very natural.

Another way to say this: the expanding feels like sharing, or being relieved of the burden of existence. This whole world of space is available to me. I don't have to contain everything right here in a way that is stuffy, cramped or burdensome. And evoking this later, I find the feeling, that there is a lot of space to live in, and this is part of how I come to feel something like being relieved of a burden. I am literally lightening up. And I would say that the burden is something I experience in this heart-chest area. So when I say my attention is expanded there is also a relaxation here in the heart area.

It seems that this explicit expansiveness moves out especially from both my head and heart centers. And, again, it has a lot to do with the heart, I don't have to hold everything around my heart. It is like suddenly getting a bigger house so you don't have to work so hard to figure out where to put everything, work to make it fit in a certain space.

I see I now make a discrimination between heart-mind expanding, and feeling emotionally touched. I didn't feel that later. I felt clear, limpid not unfeeling, but not colored by emotion - or reactivity - either.

Also, I see that the sensation of expanding is continuous, ongoing, not like something that happens once and is done. I don't get tired of it. Instinctively, I refresh my sense of it every moment or two, and I do this with a small inner gesture borne of curiosity—is it still there, is it still vibrant—and then this curiosity blends with the wonder of expanded spaciousness and I rest happily in that, until another moment or so when the unfolding repeats itself. Gradually my resting intervals may grow a little longer, a little deeper. These are not unfamiliar gestures for me, but they have a particular simplicity that is very grand, like infinitely small bubble-like atoms vibrating ever so gently.

Post Experience

After standing at the mirror, I sit down to write some notes. I see someone come up and pose in front of the mirror, her back to it, to get her picture taken in front of mirrors. A surge of something like a slightly viscous river rises from about my diaphragm, feeling like pure urgency, and I can hardly restrain from shouting “Stop Stop! Turn around! Turn around and look.” Subsequently, I see that this reaction is a measure of the preciousness of that experience.

Then I start to walk through the palace, and later out to the grounds, checking in again and again regarding this expansiveness. I did forget it easily, but as soon as I had interest to inquire again, it was there. And I began to see that everything was sitting in expansive space, just as the mirrored room had been. I see that everything is sitting in the space of the mind in just that way. I start to feel the objects around me as part of the same expanse with me, we are all connected in that way. And the expanse of my mind, the field of my experience is itself the mirror in which everything appears. I gaze at the very solid, high wall in one of the outer, ornate rooms, and feel a shift in my connection to it, a connection linked by space, and also a concordant shift in its own status as an object, as solid, or as real, and concomitant with this is its increasing clarity it and of its totally resting, abiding, in my experience-field. Anything I see in this way gets both more precise and less objectified. The dissolving of the usual subject-object abyss means I am in direct contact with this object, and it with me, and instead of my usual sense of “it’s out there and not me and I don’t really care or connect to it”, it is a sense that this is part of my reality and no other, and my connection is ongoing and absolutely intimate.

I am left with a feeling of softness, intimacy, closeness to everything. I forget it easily, but it also refreshes very easily. It didn’t occur to me then but I would say now that I experienced that this was an act of kindness on the part of the artist, that he was not adding to the room, exactly—though he added a whole other room through the mirroring—and this was soothing and relaxing. The sense of naturalness associated with transparency

and opening to see the room behind you just seems right. Vision should be 360 degrees. Also it was fun. I stood in front of it for a while, mostly looking up enjoying all the space.



DEEP MIRROR YELLOW



Deep Mirror Yellow

by Sophia

Pre-experience

I am intrigued by the intention of the artist and feel curious to see how and what my perceptual experience of the pieces will be. In the case of Deep Mirror Yellow, many people are in a single file line waiting to stand in front of it. No one seems to notice that Deep Mirror Black is there. I wait in line for my turn to experience Deep Mirror Yellow. I step in front of Deep Mirror Yellow.

Experiencing

I enter the experience through a focus of my attention shifting inwardly and me taking in what was there in front of me. In entering the experience I claim it as my experience. To enter into the experience, it mattered that I made a choice about having my own experience of this piece.

As the focus of my attention shifts inwardly, it is as if I am alone and by myself in the experience. I am aware of the line behind me, however, the outer sounds have become dim and have dropped away.

As I look to the mirror at the end of the yellow tube, I simultaneously have a sense of separation and togetherness yet the experience itself was not shared with the others in the line. In the sense of separation, it was very quiet and there was a deep sense of peace and calmness. The focus of my attention in interaction with the piece has created the peaceful quietness.

As I see the image of myself in the mirror, I feel completely alone. I can also see the line behind me as if it is its own image. The roundness of the mirror has taken me to this place of aloneness and separateness, like I had entered another world. Even though I feel completely alone in my experience, I feel very exposed and it felt very vulnerable. It surprised me, this feeling of vulnerability and how vulnerable I felt, which arose in the interaction with the piece. As the experience was so brief, I am aware that the sense of vulnerability had just begun to emerge or surface in the space of and in the interaction between myself and the piece.

The vulnerability seems like a soft edge of exposure and also contained yet with diffuse borders. It is a soft tenderness touching on a quality of vulnerability within the sense of exposure. There was an intimacy in this and it was almost as if I became a part of the installation and was on display.

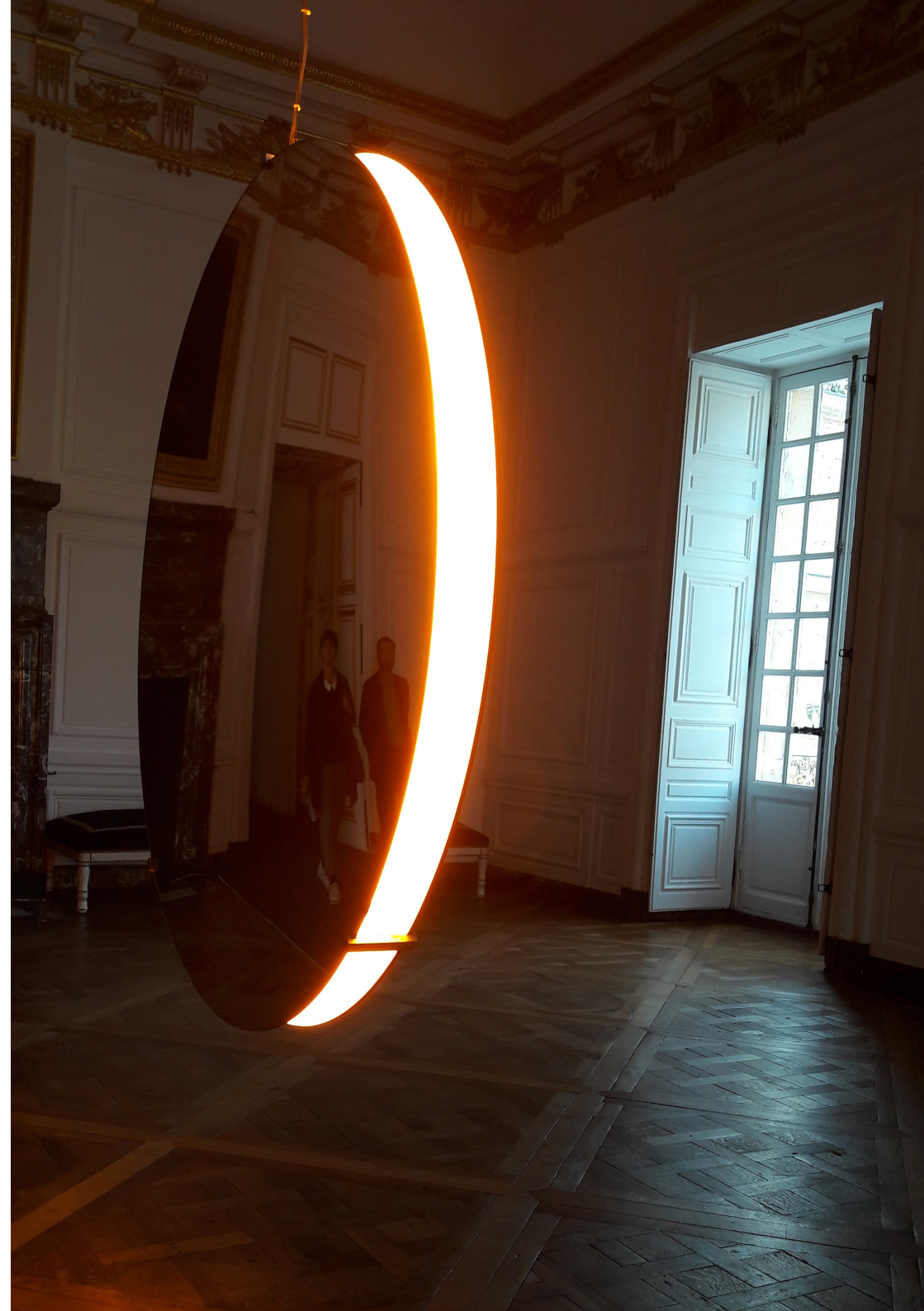
As soon as I touched this experience of being exposed and feeling vulnerable, I know it is me, which happened when my eyes met my eyes in the mirror--- a meeting of my own eyes. I suddenly know it's me and then this experience of exposure and vulnerability arises because I have met myself. The awareness emerges and the feeling is there. I felt very aware of being in my own experience and I am not alone. I am alone and I am not alone and I am very exposed right now, in fact, I am exposing myself as I recognize and see myself in the mirror. It just feels like "Wow!"

I am also always knowing the line is behind me waiting and observing yet I do not sense the presence of people behind me due to the complete immersion in my own experience with Deep Mirror Yellow. The immersive interaction with the piece created a spatiality of experience where these senses and feelings arose. I only know people are behind me due to seeing the image of them in the mirror behind the image of me. I notice this then feels like a new moment, a choosing to leave and let the next person experience the piece. I leave yet not in a hurry.

Post Experience

I am aware as I reflect on this experience, that it would have been a completely different experience had there not been a line of people. They became a part of my experience only because of the mirror and as I was so immersed in my own experience.

SOLAR COMPRESSION



Solar Compression

by Ruth

Two moments particularly stood out during this piece. One was the realization that I could see things that I wouldn't otherwise be able to see, by looking at this disc. And the second moment was when it stopped turning, I was going to say spinning but it's too slow for that really. Perhaps when it stopped revolving, and it felt like time stopped.

Entering the room

I walked in, and the disc was suspended in the centre of the room which was to my left, and, I see a mirror, circular. I'm immediately aware that this is an object I want to engage with. I immediately look up to see how it's suspended and notice that I'm looking at the mechanisms of this piece of art, and not simply absorbing what it's like. I'm already trying to work out how it works, I notice that, and then I try and settle my mind to the piece.

As before there are quite a few people there and so they obscure my view of the piece and this is part of it. A lot of photographs being taken. And this is distracting, a little. So I guess I'm supposing this now after the fact, but, I guess there is a sense of some wish to be able to engage directly and, solely, with this disc – some sense this would be a way to connect with it more than this mediated, or somehow disrupted, interaction. There's a sense that it feels like a disruption to the interaction with this piece, at this point.

So I walk in and I don't stop, there's a memory that comes, of Marcus saying, it's important to view it from all sides. I don't want to stop too soon, it's a sense of wanting to take in more of it. To pause right at the beginning of the room would feel premature. So I keep walking and I've got past where it's hanging, before I realize that it's revolving. It's a pendulous disc, it's revolving, and at the very edge of it is an orange light like the crescent in the previous piece, from a certain angle this one has an orange light crescent around the edge of it. Very, very fine. I keep moving into the room and around to the left. I can walk around, and be visually engaged

with the piece the whole time. So I am taking it in as I move. And it's almost like my walking seems to be about the same speed as the revolution of the disc because, I find I can't get away from it. And there's a moment where I feel like I want to look around the side and I can't, because we are moving at the same speed.

Encountering the piece as a gift

There has been a sense of anticipation. It hasn't had very long to build, actually, because for some reason I had forgotten there was another one. I was already feeling quite full, engaged, and I was aware that we only had a very limited time, so somehow in all that I had forgotten about this piece which in fact was the one most emphasised before. So it was almost a surprise, and so there was this very brief moment of anticipation, of looking forward to it.

I had this feeling that it might be special somehow, I don't know why, that there might be something about it that might reward attention. But it wasn't like an expectation of what it would be like, it was more of a.... "gift" is a good word for the feeling. And of course, of course it is only natural to be open to what this gift might bring. Something like that. I have a sense there might have been a subtle, subtle, lifting, an enlivening of the body, a sense of having energy to give to something coming, the possibility of something else.

Settling in

And so I pause, a little bit, and I'm noticing already that other members of the group have seated themselves around the periphery of the room, the hall, on the floor.

And I can see that there's a space, a good space, empty, on the other side of the disc from where the entranceway was. And so I locate myself there, a little way from the window, and there's clear space around me, there's no furniture, there's nothing, just the parquet flooring, powder blue walls, and, a little distance in this part of the room, from the people located closest to me.

So, there I sit. It's comfortable immediately, it's a good spot. And, I become more and more aware of this gentle revolution of the disc and there is something in this motion, movement of it, I'm not sure what to say about it I just have this sense that there is something happening that's connected to that, that's some function of that? Something... to do with it. Something... soothing, calming. And neither of those seems quite right, because, it's not that I'm uncalm before, but, I want to say rhythmic, but it didn't exactly have a rhythm but there's something, perhaps entrainment, it's doing something to me. I can't say more about what it's doing at the moment.

So I'm going to try and take myself back to this experience of observing the disc from this side. And it takes a really long time for this disc to revolve, so, it really feels like ages before the whole of the face of one side of the disc moves across my sight-line, and I can see where the orange light is coming from, which is like a kind of fluorescent tube of lighting, set up, that sits between two discs. And there's a clear space between them, so it's sandwiched between them, and there is also something that I'm noticing about how the mirror discs reflect back the room. It's not a direct reflection, it's a reflection that shows more. And at many points I'm aware of trying to work out if it's a convex shape, and that's what it is, there's definitely distortion but it doesn't seem like it's a smooth convex shape it feels like there's more to it than that. It's not that simple. And when I view the disc side on, so when the light is visible in-between them, I can't see a bulge.

And so I look to see if it's concave, or if one side's convex and the other side is concave, and I, I don't know. I can't work it out. I try to work out which way it would be – how would the distortions be, if it were one or the other.

And I've noticed that because they have a particular shape, the mirrors are showing me more than I would otherwise be able to see. And it feels like that is a meaningful thing to be happening, to recognise how limited my sight would be of the room from this point without this piece. And, I've been looking at it but what it shows me is a moving vista, a view on the room that takes me all the way round. It's giving me something that I don't already have. Something valuable. It's showing me more.

The disc stopped, and time stopped too. There was a moment when... the disc stopped. It stopped revolving. And it felt like time stopped. It felt very meaningful. You know, it seemed significant. Without being heavy. I was slightly perturbed... it was something a bit more neutral than that. But there was a feeling of suspension. It was like, the revolution of the disc was suspended, and somehow, so was I. I just thought that motion would go on forever.

And so when it stops moving, the panorama stops too. It's fixed at one point. It's like this. I'm here, and it's like this. It's facing this wall. And so, then, although it is showing me something I wouldn't be able to see, I've lost this moving vista of everything, taking in the whole scene, it's not doing that any more. It is a soft feeling of loss. It's not painful. I don't rebel against this loss, I'm... Because what immediately happens, is a sense that time is suspended, and I'm suspended too. And then there's a kind of, again gentle, but a kind of "wow" moment, of how um, ((very long pause))



the power of this moment. It felt like time stopped. Because I'm experiencing the world through this mirror, and the mirror has stopped, and the world has stopped, everything stops, and there's this incredibly gentle feeling of peace. Of stillness. That's in me too. I have this stillness. I'm not trying anything. I'm not doing anything. And it's almost like the possibility of not doing anything has been opened up by this disc stopping.

A new space

It was kind of beyond being pleasant or unpleasant. It was like an actual... space created. I mean, it's almost like another dimension becomes a possibility and it's provoked by the piece. It's doing something; it's been doing something to me. And I realise that at this moment; that this is happening because of this disc. And in particular, because of its motion. And then it very gently eased itself into motion again, the other way. And really I think this pause was very short, but the stillness, of that pause, stayed with me. It didn't end when the motion started again. It really stayed with me.

GLACIAL ROCK FLOWER GARDEN



Glacial Rock Flower Garden

by Charlotte

Pre-experience

My mode of engagement is curiosity as I had just heard that this piece has received a variety of receptions. Walked towards it with an awareness of body. My body felt open – especially in the front part as if it already wanted to embody it.

Experience

Letting come: Just standing in front of it and keeping all senses open. I see it is mud and that it is cracked. I feel the dryness of the surface of the mud on my skin. The classical music that was playing was loud and did not fit... My inner hearing heard cracking dryness and bobbling mud.

My attention shifts from body-focused to mind-focused.

I noticed the fountain that created the border around the mud.

I loved the piece immediately. I felt a connection with the oeuvre. My heart felt open. I felt I was in untamed nature. Intensity in energy level in my body. Sun on my skin – I am warm.

I evoked and immersed myself into an association of volcanic landscapes (I have seen in New Zealand, Japan, USA, Guatemala, Costa Rica and imagined it would look like this in Iceland). It was wild, untameable by humans. Loved it, felt a strong sense of body and presence. Felt happy.

I suddenly realized this was not untamed nature.

(Can we look at the precise moment you want to explore between these two different views of the piece. You have the first impression arriving open and feeling of joy. And then this moment of realization that you described as physical. Can we look more at the body sensations and the thoughts that come with it. The chill... the physical is coming before the thoughts.)

Definitely, the chill yes. And probably something happens to my hearing as well. The hearing changed and I heard sounds as if I was in a closed glass environment – as if a huge bell made of glass was surrounding me. The inner sensation becomes somewhat more important than the outer, that it feels like I am isolated.

Probably just a fraction of a second. There is a focus but no clarity. The chill I feel the moment I have this realisation has a physical movement as if the upper body is contracting.

I then had the association of being a person in the 19th century going to the World Expo in Paris and looking at a whole village from Indonesia being moved to Paris, so Parisians/Europeans could look at them. And the inhabitants were supposed to live their lives as they do normally “at home”. We don’t do this with humans any longer but we do it with nature.

There is a physical feeling of contraction in my body.

After this I saw the oeuvre like a Japanese garden: a total taming of the nature – but pretending as if it is untamed and looking exactly like nature. But they dig up the trees and sometimes prune the roots... Everything is so controlled. And I felt like suffocating, I felt detained, being tied up when I saw the piece.

Post experience

I felt exhausted and tired (that left when I then met the Fog Assembly) and I had a long inner dialogue about nature–culture, being eclectic, taking in and gazing at something that is a mere representation – and the positive effect of that gaze on people. Wilderness in a super-controlled environment. It made me look at Japanese gardens and Baroque gardens having much more in common with the Glacier Rock Flower Garden.



Glacial Rock Flower Garden

by Mary Anne

I remember thinking about the piece before entering the space. Coming in there were a lot of people I had to pass. I had an urge to come into the piece – a hunger to experience it. Standing at the piece I stopped and took it in. I had a lot of thoughts about the formal aspects of the piece, as any art historian would have. I pushed the thoughts away and concentrated on the key question: how does it feel?

I stood for a long time and focused on experiencing the piece. I tried to focus on the second when I finally got through the crowd of people, and saw the piece. When I focus on this very second, the description sounds very dramatic, because the elements of the experience are zoomed up and looked at.

The second I came to the piece, it was as if my body expanded and my body became wider and round like the shape of the fountain. I felt very present and intense. Besides the feeling of my body expanding I had a strong feeling of the centre of my front body – right under my ribs. Looking deeper into this point it was like a centre of energy – almost burning. This was not a wild fire – but when I took the sense of intensity I felt and zoomed it up – it looked like something burning. It was very intense. I felt a lot of pleasure – like when you eat a piece of chocolate and have a rewarding feeling in the entire body.

FOG ASSEMBLY



Fog Assembly

by Jacques

Mode of engagement (perceptual position)

I would describe my perceptual position during this experience as one of visual attending. I observe the fog as it descends and hangs in the air, or otherwise swirls about. I also moved my position, sometimes sitting for a while in the same place and sometimes walking slowly. Sometimes I am within the fog and seeing it from within, sometimes I am outside it and seeing it from without. There are also other kinds of experiences such as feeling the water droplets against my skin, or standing with eyes closed, but the following descriptions come mainly from the moments when I visually attend to the movements of the fog.

What does it do to me?

Attention

The experience of visually attending to the motion of the fog has a specific effect on the quality of my attention. My attention becomes 'decentred' or 'fuzzy'. But this is not a kind of 'daydreaming'. It is rather an experience of being absorbed and interested, but in a decentred, fuzzy kind of way.

Descriptemes (extracts from the interview):

'There is nothing concrete to attend to and this is somehow absorbing.'

'I am absorbed in a way that is distinctly different to when I am absorbed in an intellectual sense. I can rest in this being absorbed.'

Status of the boundary between outer and inner

One experience I have is that when I observe the fog there is a distinct shift in my awareness of the boundary between myself and the 'outer' world. It is as if the concrete, physical outer world becomes slightly more distant. This is also connected to the slight sense of 'fuzziness' already mentioned. But it is not as if I become distant or dreamy, it is as if I at some level wake up. It is the outer world that is experienced as dreamy and slightly distant, but I become more awake to myself.

Presence

This sense of outer dreaminess and inner wakefulness is also experienced as a slightly heightened sense of presence. I become aware that in the constantly shifting and mobile experience of the fog, I become aware of myself as a constant and perhaps not-changing presence.

When I try to go into this sense of presence I find that it is this, that at least in part, makes the experience 'absorbing'.

The others around me also seem quite distant, as if they are figures in a dream. I don't really feel like talking to others and I notice that nobody else is talking to each other either.

Descriptemes:

'I wouldn't say I become suddenly self-conscious. It is more as if the external concrete world becomes slightly less conscious or more distant, and in this is a subtle waking up to my own presence. In becoming absorbed in the movement of the fog, I am myself present in this being absorbed and this is part of the absorbing element'. 'It is as if the fog turns down the volume on the outside world, and in this the sense of my own presence becomes louder'. 'In amongst this shifting changing is a slightly heightened presence of something that isn't changing'.

Quality of bodily experience

I notice that during this experience my body becomes relaxed and I become inwardly calm.

I also notice that I feel healthy and alive in a good way. It is as if this experience of being in a more mobile and fluid environment is at some level 'healthy' (in that I have a sense of bodily well-being). The water droplets on my skin also give me a feeling of bodily pleasure.

Fog Assembly

by Walter

In the mist...moisture - cool, wet, slippery. I can feel a pull both toward and away from the ring. Both directions. Physically. Forward from my chest, backward in my jaw and throat. A leaning. My feet are stable, rooted in the earth below me. There is anxiety. It pervades my solar plexus. I ask: is this the right way to do it?

(Would you like to go back to this moment of sensing this rainbow? That moment you felt a shift in your seeing? Describe this moment a little bit.)

I was taking a step into the mist, but the mist was moving with me. A rainbow or rainbows started to appear. I paused, turned towards the rainbow and tried to look at it. It disappeared. Then, there was a rocking sensation, trying to put myself in the right place for the rainbow to appear. But, it would fade in and out because the mist was moving. I wanted to remain in contact with the rainbow, but how?

I am moving slightly, in a circular way. My eyes rest backward into my head. My hips roll under my pelvis. My shoulders relax. I am receiving my vision with no particular object. Resting. Relaxing. Allowing. There. It clicks. The rainbow.

(Can you say how you did that? Relaxing your vision? Resting your vision? How did you do that?)

There is a physical sensation of my eyes resting back in my head. My eyes get away from what is in front of me and welcome, or allow, the periphery to come into vision. Nothing is distinct. It feels like my mind or my awareness and my eye are separate. My eyes are like a hole, or a looking glass and my awareness looks out the side of my eye—peering at the rainbow. My eyes can't turn, or it will disappear.

(There is a sense of difference between your eyes and awareness. Your eye is like a looking glass and your awareness is looking out it. Looking to the side. How do you know that it sees? I don't know if feeling is right, but perhaps how does it feel?)

Yes, I think that is right. Feeling. The rainbow isn't sharp like what is in front of me. Yet, it is distinct. It is clear in a sort of felt sense. Clearer than anything else in my vision. It is more than seeing. It is like a feeling of the rainbow. My eyes rest as a vehicle for my awareness to see. Within the visual field, there are all kinds of objects—mist, people, green grass, metal poles, etc.—yet my awareness is drawn to the rainbow. I lean... I want to grasp it, but it is a rainbow so I can't. It catches me in a way...it draws my awareness to it.

Fog Assembly

by Paula

Sitting down after the rainbow circle comes to an end, I sit with a sense of space. When closing eyes, it becomes stronger. It is a space where all the colour appearances of the rainbow are potentially dancing, but what I perceive is less the colours, but the space quality.

[Auto-Elicitation Question] When you sense space, what do you sense? How do you know that it is space what you sense, and not something other?

It is the absence of obstruction that makes it space. Also the dancing rainbow qualities have this non-obstructive and therefore wondrous, magical quality. I sense it almost as if I become space – the sense of self is space-like in this moment. And I sense a relief that comes with it, and a great joy. The space is filled with this subtle quality of joy and celebration and wonder. I do not ‘see’ any image of a rainbow but I sense this unobstructed space, and rainbow colours subtly dancing in that space.

(When you sense space, what do you sense?) The sense of self is spatially in this moment. There is a shift of perspective: At first, I sense the space in front of me, but I am not part of that space. And then I become immersed in it. I dive into a pool of space.

(When you perceive space, what do you perceive?) I perceive a quality of space, a felt sense of space, vast and limitless. It does not have any other characteristics. It is plain space, space space. I sense relief coming with it. It is joyful. This is how it feels like to be space.

(What do you do to perceive space?) At first there is a more solid sense of ‘me’ perceiving the space in front of me, distinct from me. When I ask myself what do I do to perceive the space... I kind of dissolve in space. I open up to this sense of space. I dive into it like into a pool. And I love that – diving into this sense of space. I trust that space. It feels freeing. So ‘I’ don’t ‘do’ this. It is when ‘I’ ‘do’ less, the space becomes prominent. And it feels like a relief.

(When you feel the relief, how do you feel it?) I can tune into it in my body, there is a quality of lightness around my heart area. But when I do this, the space quality disappears. When I perceive space more strongly, I do not perceive my body boundaries. My body becomes space. And the sense of self becomes spacious – it is being the space it perceives. But they do not merge. It not that they become simply one thing. There is space, and there is a space-like sense of self perceiving this space.

It is the rainbow that triggered this sense of space: When it dissolves, and when also the inner image of rainbow dissolves, the space remains. And in the space remains a ‘rainbow-ness’ of space. It is a quality almost of joy. But I hesitate to call it ‘joy’, because usually ‘joy’ is something more solid. It brings me back to a more narrow sense of body, away from the vast sense of space. And yet the space itself is imbued and pervaded by a subtly joyful quality. It is a playful space. And this is also what I mean by the ‘rainbow-ness’ of space.

(What do you do to perceive the ‘rainbow-ness’ of space?) I tune into it... it is like a radio frequency. I tune into the frequency of rainbow space. I only look for it, and find it. I call it, and it answers. But at first I have to have some taste of the experience, before I can tune into it.

Fog Assembly

by Toivo

General description of my experience

I spend a great deal of time inside the Fog Assembly circle and sometimes slaloming in and out of it around the supportive beams. The steam streaming out in unpredictable patterns from the circular tube at the top of the round metal beams creates ever-changing pattern. We are not wrapped in them, it's not so dense, but there is a play of appearance and disappearance of fellow visitors as their motions draw patterns of their own. The space outside of the circle is quite visible most of the time, depending on the play of steam and my changing positions.

Pre-experience

While allowing the experience to unfold (which took some gradual easing into relaxation), my attention has been drawn several times to Paula close to the circle's edge, standing there still, solid, rooted and broad-shouldered. At times she stretches her arms upwards, welcoming the droplets of steam from above. She stands there and stands there. She is what she sees, what she experiences. That's how she comes across to me.

At some point in my discovery, I feel a pull from the spot where Paula is. The pull comes from that spot, from Paula, from her posture and what it suggested to me. The way she appears is like a native American, standing in her strength, that image that took its origin in my childhood reading and movies and evolved over the years to become the image of standing in one's power. So I moved toward her, pulled by this appearance and a little curious: "she's been there for a while, standing!" (Does one stand for so long in a single place? What is it she is with and I don't see, need not see, but may see?).

Experiencing: encounter with a full-circle pocket size rainbow

I move towards Paula, from inside the circle. We exchange a furtive yet present glance, absorbed as we are in our respective experiences. I make a U-turn. A rainbow is there, to my right,

embedded in the fairly trans-lucid fog space in front of me. Paula says it's a full circle. Something in me doubts Paula's affirmation: the last time I saw a rainbow full circle was in 1990 in Prague, in and above the river Havel. My head and trunk turn slightly to the left. I see a full rainbow circle now, about as circular as it gets. There it is, a full almost perfectly shaped almost round rainbow, rounder than oval. Some thoughts cross my mind on the edge of liminal space. Something in me is still a bit incredulous. A full circle rainbow is a harbinger of good fortune (so I should be open to it, a tired inner voice tells me). At least it seals the magic of place, like in Prague so many years ago. Then, there is something a bit tense in me, like I am not responding with a sense of childhood marvel to this apparition (the memory of me having run into the circle to begin with, jumping rather than dancing rushes through my mind. Through my mind? The image is more in my body and in a dryness of my throat. I know, in my head, like a thought, this running was like trying to free myself of tiredness and stress. My body was a little drawn towards the installation, but more so, it was pushed from inside myself, producing somewhat forced motions towards relaxation. There is a sense of thirst, at once bodily (like a lack of fluid-body-tissue-tone) and existential: can I meet this rainbow and open up to a sense of marvel?). These thoughts come to me, while the cobweb of water droplets dropping down slowly, almost floating (round by their weight, light by their very motion) towards the moist grass on the ground where small gullies have formed. Droplets of water fall on my face: hair, nose and cheeks. As they meet my skin, they have no form, I don't imagine them, or visualise them, it's a very soft light moist presence. The fog and water droplets are a seamless motile tissue which holds me and the rainbow. It's a soft feel, like there is skin contact, intimate. My mental thought activities (that which pre-occupied me and shaped the start of the experience) slowly subside.

While not moving, it's like I now raise my eyes towards the rainbow, heeding attention away from the droplets that refreshed my skin to the soft glow of the rainbow. It is obliquely upwards oriented, starting from close to my feet, only just a few times bigger than me. It's like a hoop I can step into (that is a startling realisation) while still being held by it (a felt kind of awareness tells me that). The rainbow is lying weightlessly in a space woven by the fog which also enfolds me. The whole scene has the feel of an inner space, it's somewhat dreamlike. Subliminal associations feed into my multisensory experience - I don't consciously live them, but they are there as a ground of images which respond to images generated by Eliasson's Fog Assembly device (you might say "dispositif" in French). There is so much softness, that I liken it to the unusual softness of Hans Memling portraits, or rather the felt memory of Memling portraits. I don't think consciously of Memling, but the affective feel of my past encounters with his paintings is present (that's why I retrieve his name in the auto-elicitation). The rainbow and its dreamlike moist and blurry colours almost un-consciously connect me with memories of the rainbows I have seen in Flemish "miniature" paintings, one of which represents St John on Patmos, having his visions. A soft spot opens below my solar plexus, something tender and contemplative. Then there is a feeling in my right chest, which blends both timid happiness and happy-making sadness. I keep staying there for a long time, while other events unfold and keep modulating themselves.

Post-experience

Some time later, the water supply has been turned off, end of the show. Some eighteen of us gather on the field outside Fog Assembly, sitting, lying, taking notes, being still. The silence lasts, five, ten minutes perhaps. That is the other very unusual, memorable event of the encounter with *Fog Assembly*.





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