

Eye and I: Assumptive Folly in the I and the Institution

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Abstract

Eye and I: Assumptive Folly in the Eye and the Institution

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3D4M: ceramics + glass + sculpture

Following is a discussion of bias in the visual processing system and the complex, intertwined relationship between both physiologically determined and socially/culturally determined forms of bias. Through an examination of historical attitudes towards objectivity in relationship to perception, and a discussion of the ways in which prevailing attitudes have not kept pace with current science, I explore the intersection between assumptions, orthodoxy, and objectivity. The perceptive faculties harbor evolutionarily inherited forms of preference, while the act of viewing art bears the burden of long histories of accepted practices. Additionally, the institutions where we interact with art frame the experiences of interaction, dictating possible outcomes of engagement within those frameworks. Through an examination of various artists and scientists work, and a discussion of my own work, I establish an avenue to discuss the importance of contemplating bias in the eye, the mind, and the institution.

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Introduction

When your eyes open the world pours in. How is the information that pours in related, or not, to an objective truth, or facts about the world? What grounds do we have for being skeptical of this information and to what ends? The light that enters the eye is processed and contributes to the “I,” passing through various levels of processing along the way, not to mention being colored by various assumptions that we bring to the table—both physiologically determined assumptions and those socially/politically determined. Humans are infinitely complex systems that are rife with suggestibility, prone to manipulation and malleability, easily distracted, and inherently biased on a biological level.

Western societies, for centuries, have embraced the idea that humans are perfect recording devices; that visual, tactile, and auditory phenomena are flawlessly copied to a ticker tape objectively representative of our passing lives. This understanding is not only wrong, it has been extremely damaging. Various branches of scientific research have repeatedly poked holes in this concept over the past two centuries, exposing the subjectivity of perception, the bias built into our perceptual faculties and the malleability of the information that is received. Evolution favored the utility of information, not the authenticity of the content. Indeed, our survival relied on it.

Rarely are we confronted by the shortcomings of our perceptual faculties (for those with “normally functioning” systems), in turn we rarely apply scrutiny to them. Yet, for those who go looking, the evidence is readily available. What then is the point of staring our collective weaknesses in the face? I argue recognition; recognition that we are flawed, fallible creatures actively involved in forming a useful picture of the surrounding world. I am interested in the

zones where visual input is strictly at odds with the processed content and zones where the content is scarcely legible. The destabilizing nature of these arenas is disorienting; the stable ground of infallibility becomes suspect, the blatant imprecision humbling. Following is a discussion of some of the prominent scientific research on the topic of perception, especially related the visual system, and the work of a number of artists—including myself—who have found creative methods to disrupt our perceptive faculties—sometimes through optical means and other times through social/political means. Additionally, there is an attempt to dissect and discuss collective assumptions that steer our perceptive faculties within the institutions where we interact with art and examine the utility in employing this strategy.

Attention and the Anchor

While it is true that when we open our eyes the world pours in, the totality of that information does not make it very far downstream in the processing. There are a number of contributing factors that immediately limit the type and amount of information that the brain will attempt to deal with. Firstly, attention dictates where the perceptive resources will be allocated. After attention has directed the perceptive faculties, the light entering the eye immediately begins its multi-stage processing, where the information is distilled at every step to maximize utility and comprehension of what is available. While humans possess incredibly complex and precise—in many respects—visual processing systems, they are inherently limited in scope. The complexity of the processing that the system engages in requires a vast amount of resources, so in a conservative move to hedge against inundation, the brain exercises extreme selectivity in the process. There is simply too much information available to effectively process it all.

The field of research surrounding attention, and its importance in relation to perception, has made significant developments in the past two centuries and has contributed greatly to the current understanding of how humans experience the world:

One of the most important nineteenth-century developments in the history of perception was the relatively sudden emergence of models of subjective vision in a wide range of disciplines during the period 1810–1840. Dominant discourses and practices of vision, within the space of a few decades, effectively broke with a classical regime of visibility and grounded the truth of vision in the density and materiality of the body. One of the consequences of this shift was that the functioning of vision became dependent on the complex and contingent physiological makeup of the observer, rendering vision faulty, unreliable, and, it was sometimes argued, arbitrary. Even before the middle of the century, an extensive amount of work in science, philosophy, psychology, and art involved a coming to terms in various ways with the understanding that vision, or any of the senses, could no longer claim an essential objectivity or certainty.¹

While the developing field of attention research made great strides in the 19th and 20th century to help weed out any remaining notions of objectivity with respect to the visual processing system, recent research on inattention blindness, change blindness and selective attention, have radically upped the ante in terms of our understanding of how limited humans scope of attention is. *The Invisible Gorilla Experiment*, developed by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons, serves as an illustrative example of how far notions of attention selectivity and inattention blindness can be pushed; who would expect to totally miss a person in a gorilla suit walking in plain view through their field of vision and remaining for nine seconds?² This experiment highlights a difficult to swallow fact; humans are not only selective when it comes to attention, they can become completely ignorant to events in their visual field if concentration is attuned to a different unfolding event. This research is important to keep in mind when considering the institutional frameworks where we engage with art; what kinds of information

¹ Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 11-12.

² Simon, Daniel. *The Invisible Gorilla*. (2009). Retrieved from: http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/gorilla_experiment.html

are prioritized and which types are we effectively being encouraged to ignore within those frameworks.

Long histories of engagement between patrons and arts institutions have established acceptable practices for viewers. Social and institutional norms, while not set in stone, dictate how various artistic mediums are investigated and interrogated. Simple assumptions, like the ability of art objects to transcend time and space, aid in rendering architectural and environmental factors of exhibition spaces unimportant or unnoticed. There is a belief that viewing a Van Gogh hung in the Met will be a more or less equivalent experience to viewing that same Van Gogh hung in the Louvre or the LACMA. While these notions promote a very distinct and prominent variety of engagement with art, they effectively make a number of alternatives unattainable. I became fascinated with the types of engagement that seemed limited within the “white cube” and spent a period of time experimenting with how a recalibration of expectations may invite different forms of interaction in my work, *Shift* (fig. 1). In this work, the viewer enters a seemingly empty room illuminated at one end. The initial reveal is of the utmost importance; when one confronts an empty space, there must be an immediate recalibration of expectations. A viewer expecting to engage an artwork is caught off guard by the apparent vacancy and I believe this method invites a different form of engagement. A curious viewer will venture into the space and will meet a wholly unexpected activation when a certain threshold is passed, which varies depending on the height of the viewer. A thin veil of micro glass beads covering the illuminated portion of the gallery floor activates a rainbow that moves across the ground, mirroring the movement of the viewer. The work is effectively only available when a viewer has entered the space; the movement and vantage point of the observer render the work visible.

Shift challenged me to confront the functional parameters of exhibition spaces and evaluate the persuasive effects that are exerted by these framing devices. Contemplating the notion of transcendence in relationship to art objects has highlighted the importance for me to employ methods to anchor my own works in the time and place that they are exhibited.

Ingress/Egress (fig. 2), employed various densities of tulle and athletic meshes, in three frames that integrated seamlessly into the existing architecture of the Jacob Lawrence Gallery. The three frames sat in existing windows of the gallery and mediated, to varying extents, images of the outside environment. The three frames were sites to explore various phenomena associated with the ways in which the human eye recognizes and distinguishes pattern and also mixes and separates color. The distance separating fabric layers and the total depth of fabric made it difficult for the eye to isolate and focus on a single layer and disrupted the eyes ability to smoothly change focal points. Northeast exposure through the gallery windows subjected the work to changing light conditions throughout the day, causing the screens to throw a subtle cast of color across the gallery, noticeable only to the attentive viewer. With my recent work, *Field* (fig. 3), I opened a door in the exhibition space to the outside and filled the void with a frame that was stretched with athletic mesh, functioning similar to scrim. Sunlight was softened and diffused across the space, the breeze allowed to push into the room, and soft sounds of leaves rustling in the trees and busy, late spring bird activity filtered into the space. While the objects in the space were inert, the installation dynamically responded to the changing environmental conditions throughout the day. I have experimented with various other methods for employing this strategy through my investigations and have found it to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the new work that I have been pursuing. We do not make work in a vacuum. We also do not

exhibit work in a vacuum. It has become important to me to find ways to establish a unique place in space and time for my work to exist.

Phenomenological Presence vs. Inattentional Blindness

A discussion of perception and art could have any number of logical starting points, but for the purposes of this discussion we shall begin in the middle of the last century with the emergence of the Light and Space movement in California. Robert Irwin is of particular interest because of his intense decade of inquiry in the 1960's that was focused on understanding and interrogating the long held, deeply ingrained, orthodoxies in the realm of painting and art more generally, that were rendering some details immediately apparent, while leaving others woefully unattended.

After a brief period of fascination and experimentation with Abstract Expressionism, Irwin became obsessed with the “phenomenological presence” of his paintings, abandoning an interest in content and focusing on a unique approach to minimalism that sought to maximize harmonious perceptual relationships. While a number of Irwin's objects from the 60's are of interest, for this discussion we will focus on his approach to perception, and his full scale assault on the deeply held orthodoxies of the institutions of painting and the art world. He began questioning the status quo, essentially wondering why these institutions, functioning as framing devices, were encouraging people to ignore the totality of the objects and environments that they were experiencing. Collective investment in the desire for objects to transcend time and space was propping up a form of institutionally waged inattentional blindness. Once Irwin came to this realization he became obsessed with contemplating and exploring the source and implications of

these widely accepted practices. Why was it seemingly impossible for viewers to attend to the details that were laid bare before them? To dig into this more deeply we must first examine how attention, in particular selective attention, steers the bounds of visual perception, strictly limiting the scope of awareness. This, in conjunction with how institutions function as framing devices and affect assumptions, contribute to what may and what may not be seen within those conceptual frameworks. Irwin recalled:

“How do I paint a painting that doesn’t begin and end at the edge? In other words, I no longer felt comfortable with that sense of confinement. It no longer made sense to me. Now, I had not worked that out philosophically, I had not even begun to dig into the root question of how an orthodoxy like that becomes so deeply rooted that we don’t even question it. It’s simply there. Obviously, there’s a good reason for that, or it wouldn’t have lasted as long as it has. But for some reason my activities brought me up to the question on what basis we assume that. Still, in the beginning it was a simple artistic challenge: How do I paint a painting that does not begin and end at an edge but rather starts to take in and become involved with the space or environment around it?”³

A contemporary work that brings to mind notions of limited attention and scopes of awareness is Nina Katchadourian’s, *Dust Gathering*, that came in the form of a 30-minute audio tour around the New York MoMA exploring various sites of dust accumulation and also abatement. The title and subject seem like an obvious nod to Man Ray’s famous photograph, *Dust Breeding*, 1920. As stated on MoMA’s website:

Dust consists of material from both inside and outside, from Earth and the cosmos, from places very high and very low—and at the Museum, it’s literally an intermingling of different people from around the world. Noticing particularly dusty spaces in the Museum inspired Katchadourian to interview staff members about this ever-present substance that remains mostly out of sight. The audio tour features voices from within the Museum that the public rarely hears from, performing tasks that the public rarely sees. Find out what it takes to dust the suspended helicopter in the Marron Atrium, learn about the building’s complex air-filtration systems, and get to know some of the particularly troublesome, dust-attracting modernist sculptures.⁴

³ Weschler, Lawrence. *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 99.

⁴ *Dust Gathering: An Audio Experience by Nina Katchadourian*. The Museum of Modern Art, www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3610.

Two years of institutional research contributed to the culmination of this project that served not so much as an institutional critique, but more precisely as a form of institutional expose, shining a light on the minutiae within that usually goes unnoticed. While the methods are entirely at odds, the work strikes a resonant chord with the lines of inquiry that Irwin was exploring in the 1960's. Both artists seem to be tugging at the question, "Yes, we are all trained to look there, but why not look over here?" The institution as a framing device invites numerous types of activity but certainly limits or discourages others. There is a suspension of perception that occurs within gallery and museum walls that has been perpetuated through centuries old orthodoxies that in many cases remain and are encouraged institutionally. Often, there is great utility in being able to ignore environmental details, especially when confronted with an architectural space that may be extremely limiting in its ability to flexibly cater to the specific needs of the exhibited artworks. Both artists strive for a sort of metaphorical turning over of the institutional rock.

The work of Irwin, and *Dust Gathering* by Katchadourian, both conceptually point toward a more mindful approach of engaging with artworks and the institutions in which they are exhibited. It encourages a practice of simply paying closer attention to that which is before you, and examining the experience in totality. In this fast-paced age of transactional communications, there may be no approach more radical than asking people to simply slow down, pay attention, and take in the physical details of artworks and spaces in which they are exhibited. It is certainly an interesting concept, but one that is difficult in practice to achieve. My personal interest in this approach manifests itself in attempts to integrate architectural and environmental details into the work, and create an experience captivating enough to hold attention for more than ten seconds. *Westward Wedge* (fig. 4), 2019, was an attempt to explore these interests and approaches in an

object. It was designed, with the use of mirrors and optically distorting glass elements, to reflect a highly abstracted representation of the current environmental light conditions of the space surrounding the object. It was important that the object was highly sensitive to changing conditions, but also that the content was abstracted sufficiently to resist image based associations, effectively providing a qualitative representation of the moment. Resisting figuration and content based associations has long been a hallmark of working in minimalist modes, which has been a consistent interest of mine throughout my time at the University of Washington. When less is available, the details become more important and more apparent. Working in this manner challenges me as a maker to do cleaner work, to exhibit the personal investment I have in quality craftsmanship that was so important to the work I was involved in before attending graduate school.

Contextual Bias and Employing Illusion

The perceptive faculties employ bias in various ways and at various points throughout the visual processing system. Recognizing and accentuating difference became an evolutionary imperative; for instance, being able to visually locate and track predators in visually complex environments (forest, jungle, savannah, etc.) was quite literally a matter of life and death as well as locating various types of food against dense foliage backgrounds. While many of the predatory threats to humans have been eliminated or severely limited, the systems that developed to aid in the survival of the species remain. Curious biologists and psychologists, as well as artists have explored bias that the visual system employs, often through the use of optical illusions. I am less interested in the work created by Op Art practitioners than I am with the

research pertaining to optical illusion that has and continues to be done in the realms of psychology and the natural sciences. This work, in contrast to the work done by many of the Op Artists, is often concerned with the sources and implications of the illusions in question, rather than exploiting a peculiarity in visual perception and pointing to it through enhancement and repetition. Certain illusions that have been shown to enhance contextual bias are of particular interest, especially simultaneous contrast illusions, including White's Illusion and gradient illusions. White's Illusion is:

An optical illusion illustrating the fact that the same target luminance can elicit different perceptions of brightness in different contexts. White's illusion is sometimes combined with the Munker illusion (a similar illusion that uses colors instead of grayscale) and referred to as the "Munker-White" illusion.⁵

While White's Illusion is fascinating on its own, it is fairly easy to extend the effects out into everyday experience and imagine the pressure this sort of contextual bias may be applying to the way we see and interpret the world. A bright red flower or piece of fruit on a green ground will pop with a little more vibrancy than it would if were isolated, a bird flying overhead on that soft blue backdrop of the sky will read much darker or lighter depending on the bird's color, and a person's appearance may shift slightly walking through a crowd of people that look nothing like them. There are an infinite number of ways that you could imagine the consequences of this illusion playing out in our collective experiences. It is most likely that much of the art made over the past 100 years would look quite different if institutions had favored blue walls or possibly ochre over the white standard. The takeaway is quite simple; we do not see brightness, or color for that matter, in an unbiased way—context is everything. White's Illusion has been of

⁵ New World Encyclopedia contributors, "White's illusion," *New World Encyclopedia*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=White%27s_illusion&oldid=941916 (accessed March 20, 2019).

particular interest to me and was the source of inspiration for *Imprecision* (fig. 5) and *When One Becomes Three: A Meditation on Contextual Bias* (fig. 6). The illusion effectively reduces relationships to a binary, accentuating and amplifying difference.

Over the past year I have had to come to terms with my apparently contradictory attitude towards Op Art, which I have a general distaste for, and the use of illusion, which I have become progressively more interested in. While Op Artists of the previous century leveraged the power of the visual phenomena associated with optical illusions, I have often felt that the engagement was superficial, relying on the eye popping visual effects rather than the broad ranging implications that are revealed in the ways that we perceive the world. Optical illusions are not fascinating because they employ some trick to deceive the viewer; rather they expose the fact that in many respects we are living within the trick. We have evolved to see and perceive the world in a way that often does not align with “objective reality.”

I have explored contextual bias in a number of works over the past two years, and have found the topic to be fertile ground for investigation and experimentation. It occurred to me that there is a very real possibility that subtle forms of bias in the visual processing system may be contributing to socially/culturally constructed forms of bias in an unseen/unnoticed way. When I first began contemplating the broad ranging implications of some of these illusions, I retraced segments of my own life experience to see if I could isolate instances when they may have been at play. *Imprecision* (fig. 5) was based on my childhood experience, and how throughout that experience, the ways in which I experienced difference morphed depending on my physical context. The work was not a direct record of how this illusion was functioning within my life, rather a contemplative gesture interested in investigating the intersection between physiologically determined forms of bias, and socially/culturally determined forms. This

intersection has been an important site of investigation that later led to the work, *When One Becomes Three: A Meditation on Contextual Bias* (fig. 6), which was included in the MFA/MDes exhibition at the Henry Art Gallery. The work expanded this concept to move beyond the interiority of my individual experience, exploring the relationship in the eye, the mind, and the institutional setting. The immersive installation utilizes black and white grating on the gallery walls to hint at the perpetual existence of the human eye's tendency to reduce visual relationships to usable bits of information. The graphic overlay on the space is a bold visual statement, proclaiming, "this reductionism is at play within this space... beyond this space... this is always at play whether it is realized or not." While the space is sparsely populated with three objects—two columns and a sizable stone—the choice of the objects and their treatment were extremely important to help establish a connection to the world beyond the room, to show that the experience is not simply an isolated virtual event, but instead a continuous underlying reality in the way humans see and perceive the world. The textural qualities of the natural stone, in contrast to the highly precise geometry and smooth surfaces present throughout the environment, was intended to give the eye a place to rest and act as a link to the world beyond the confines of the room. The simple geometric columns were intended to give form to the introduced color, while limiting content based associations. The objects are somewhere in between columns and pedestals; slightly larger than a human figure, yet short enough to draw connections to the body. They incorporate trim that match the gallery space to integrate the forms into the existing architecture of the building, alluding to institutional integration. One intention of the installation is to hint at extension; extension beyond the room of the installation and beyond the Henry Art Gallery where the work is exhibited.

Destabilizing Assumptions

James Turrell has predominantly worked with light during his career but considers himself a “sky artist” rather than a light artist. During the brief Art and Technology collaboration with Robert Irwin and Ed Wortz in the 1960’s, the group became obsessed with the effects of sensory deprivation, especially through extended periods of sitting in anechoic chambers. While Turrell is most well-known for his light works, the “Dark Spaces” that Turrell created stand out for their seemingly antagonistic approach, and an interest in placing the viewer in a state of deficit rather than in a contemplative environment infused with balanced simplicity. I have experienced *Pleiades*, which is installed in the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, a number of times and the work creeps back to mind from time to time. You are allowed to enter the work two at a time and are asked to set aside fifteen minutes for the experience to unfold. There is a narrow corridor leading up a ramp, not dissimilar to the experience of entering a movie theater, except that this ramp leads to a small platform in the middle of a dark space with room for only two chairs and for a docent to stand. Perched upon this platform, waiting for the experience to sweep me up, I was perplexed, questioning if I was experiencing anything at all. The entirety of the experience does not provide any more satisfaction or clarity; the light available in the space is on the brink of perceptibility, functionally testing the limits of the faculties, leaving you unsatisfied and slightly confused. While many of Turrell’s other works explore awe, and wonder through the highly controlled presence of light, *Pleiades* unleashes dissatisfaction/destabilization through deprivation. Turrell does not give you what you may desire. There is an interesting tension that arises that I don’t believe is explored in any other series by Turrell; namely, an emerging lack of resolution. His work is most often precisely designed and executed, highly integrated, and

satisfyingly resolved. While I can walk into a *Skyspace*, thoroughly enjoy the meditative and mindful elements of the experience, I most likely will not remember the experience in clear detail weeks later. Qualities may remain but the overall experience will fade into a blurry qualitative recollection, lacking specificity and detail. This may be in large part due to the fact that the experience is pleasant, beautiful, expertly dictated, and satisfyingly resolved. When you invert that equation, the experience stands out against the background murmur of the artist's oeuvre and additionally against an assumption that resolution is something owed to a viewer engaging art.

While Turrell was developing his light works, Maria Nordman was establishing herself in the 1960's in the Los Angeles area, first as a student at UCLA, and later creating site specific interventions. These interventions were often linked to the work of other Light and Space artists of the time and region, although she has resisted the association. While Nordman has categorically denied links to the likes of Irwin, Turrell, Wheeler, etc., it would be difficult for even the most willing skeptic to disregard all parallels in method, strategy and medium. I became aware of Nordman's work through the book, *Light and Space*, written by Jan Butterfield.⁶ It dedicates a section to Nordman's site specific work in the Los Angeles area that happened during the 60's and 70's. I was immediately drawn to the narrative surrounding the work; existing documentation of the works was limited to images of the fronts of the spaces where the interventions took place and little or not much else that I have encountered was written about the work beyond the first hand descriptions included in the book. This was in fact by design; Nordman wished to limit the distribution of the work to word of mouth and went to great lengths to limit media coverage. I began drawing my own conclusions about the reasoning behind such a seemingly radical stance in relation to marketing and distribution channels. A logical conclusion

⁶ Butterfield, Jan. *The Art of Light and Space* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 96-116.

could be drawn that Nordman was pushing back against the trend to elevate the artist, to celebrate the person/the ego, and instead attempt to let the work exist in and of itself. An artist resisting attribution certainly was and remains, if not a novel concept, certainly an unpopular one. While ideas of recognizing value and beauty divorced from notions of authorship have gone in and out of popularity in the world of craft, with proponents such as Soetsu Yanagi⁷, they are less prevalent in the realm of art. The concept is the antithesis of many current trends concerning individual artists, trends that are primarily concerned with the celebration and elevation of the individual. While it has become clear, through further research and a conversation with the artist, that my assumptions concerning the basis for this strategy may have been unfounded, the concept retains merit as an exercise in thought; can there be an art without the artist and how do artworks function independent of their authors in an historical moment that seems equally interested in the context in which the works were created as with the work itself? In the field of art that has been rapidly expanding to incorporate almost anything and everything, maybe this is one of the remaining sites of transgression? What could be more radical than to reject that which the system seems to currently desire most, namely, an exploration and celebration of the individual?

When considering destabilization of the perceptual faculties in a work of art, one work that stands out is Gary Hill's, *The Psychedelic Gedankenexperiment*, 2010-2011. As described on the artist's website:

The artist's "performance" takes place in an anechoic chamber which has been computer generated. After unfolding an abstract origami-like object that turns out to be a table with forced perspective, the artist delivers the text while constructing a large molecular model of lysergic acid diethylamide which takes the time of delivery to complete. The entire

⁷ Yanagi discusses the concept at length in his book, *The Unknown Craftsman*.

work is performed backwards, including both movement and speech, which has then been reversed to "correct" it into a comprehensible form.⁸

The effects of the artists performance are deeply moving; the action of the mouth and the body don't sync up in the way we have come to expect with speech. Gravity and its effects are playing out in reverse while the dialogue unfolds in a somewhat comprehensible way. The push and pull of the two contradictory streams of information are unsettling, and contributes to a continual destabilizing effect during the performance; our visual and auditory faculties cannot rely on inferences based on past experience. Within the peculiar environment the rules have changed, and it's a tough pill for the perceptive system to swallow.

I have attempted to destabilize assumptions through various strategies in the work I have produced over the past two years. *Shift*, discussed previously, was a clear effort to disrupt and destabilize the unspoken assumptions between a viewer, an artwork and a venue of exhibition. I have also tried destabilizing the assumptions in our visual processing system by offering up seemingly contradictory information in the visual field (most often through illusion), prompting the viewer to carefully evaluate the content and question its legitimacy. *Imprecision*, and *When One Becomes Three*, both utilized White's Illusion to exhibit various instances of colors that appeared different within the context that they were displayed, but were in fact the same. *Content* (fig. 7) employed a gradient illusion that causes the eye/mind to produce content, or more precisely alter content, in order to compensate for the gradient backdrop that the mirrors are presented on. The mirrors are situated on the object in an orientation that allows them to reflect in the vacant white walls of the gallery, simultaneously delineating the extents of the exhibition space.

⁸ Hill, Gary. *The Psychedelic Gedankenexperiment* Comments. Accessed March 21, 2019. http://garyhill.com/work/mixed_media_installation/the-psychedelic-gedankenexperiment.html.

Optics vs. Optics

When considering visual perception, and the biases that affect related processes—both physiological determined and socially/culturally determined—it is difficult disentangle the various sources and effects that seem to be exerting influence in both directions. Evolutionarily inherited assumptions determine how we see situations, people, colors, etc., and inform the assumptions that we create about the world. Conversely, social and cultural assumptions—including those existing within institutional frameworks—that we have come to adopt, dictate where and how we employ our perceptive faculties, and exert influence over the ways in which we process incoming information. The process is difficult to address in terms of sorting out what is exerting influence over what, and in what direction influence is being applied, yet it seems clear that an important step in understanding this relationship is recognizing that it exists. Scientific method has been extremely effective at isolating and scrutinizing various phenomena, but has consistently fallen short when it comes to tracking complex webs of interaction between various phenomena. This is partially due to the extreme difficulty in doing so—interaction is complicated.

There remains a pervasive attitude towards human perception that it is in many ways perfect, that what is perceived is in accord with objective truth, and that memory will serve in a perfect recounting of the details. Just look at the enduring insistence of the criminal justice system to rely on eyewitness accounts, when it has been shown time and time again that memory is malleable and perception subjective. We are due for a cultural reckoning of sorts in terms of

our understanding of objectivity vs. subjectivity in relation to perception, and until we confront this glaring inequity we will continue to commit folly in the name of “certainty.”

APPENDIX

Figure 1: *Shift*, 2018.



Figure 2: *Ingress/Egress*, 2018.



Figures 3 & 3.1: *Field*, 2019.



Figure 4: *Westward Wedge*, 2019.



Figure 5: *Imprecision*, 2018.



Figure 6: *When One Becomes Three: A Meditation on Contextual Bias*, 2019.



Figure 7: *Content*, 2019.

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