rothko on speed-dial

*explorations of the Metaphysical Spatiality, Aura, and Mechanical
Reproduction of Architecture.*

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*A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of*

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE {PROFESSIONAL}

at the

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
of
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

2010

'The progression of a painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be toward clarity: toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer.'

—Mark Rothko.

Abstract.

This research explores the relationship between architectural space and the abstract expressionist art of Mark Rothko. Rothko's large format, post-1950's paintings employing his signature 'color-field' style instigated much discourse relating the works to ideas of spatiality: particularly those of atmosphere, emotional intensity, and the abstract presentation of space.

This thesis begins with the observation that there is a certain 'authenticity' lacking in reproductions of Rothko's art, where the full effect of the 'original' is lost or betrayed in the process of its reproduction. From this premise within art, it finds an analogical relationship between architecture and its reproduction, particularly in photographed space and in the conventions of architectural representation. In both these cases, the full effect of the 'space' they describe (their 'original') is argued to be in some way lost.

To explore this analogy, this thesis firstly develops a relationship between the artist and space: that 'within' the artwork, and that between this art and physical spaces (the artist's studios and spaces of exhibition). Secondly, this thesis develops a shift of the artist's spatial thinking toward architecture, with particular reference to Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'Aura' of the original work of art. As read through his essay, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [1936], the Aura is interpreted as the essential 'authenticity' of the Original work that is lost within the act of reproduction. The argument concerning Rothko and spatiality is therefore furthered through specifically focussed readings of how this Aura might manifest metaphysically (i.e. experientially, as opposed to physically), through a parallel discussion of Rothko's art and several 'thematically' related architectural case studies. In doing so, it explores the way Auratic architectural experiences can be invoked within the perception of an embodied presence.

In both the applied aspect of this research by design thesis, and in its conclusion, there is a relationship highlighted between architectural convention (as reproduction), abstraction, and the immediacy, authenticity or Aura of a spatial encounter. It is concluded that from this singular study of an abstract painter, architects can learn something of the direct exchange or translation between the users of architecture and the transcendental realm of the ideas of architecture or space.

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Acknowledgements.

My thanks to Dr. Peter Wood, for supervising this work from sprawling mess to something less so with a binding, and to my parents.

I am grateful as well to Paul James, for a generosity beyond expectation with his knowledge and criticism at the key bookends to this project. The same from Simon Twose at the mid-point provided a significant impetus for the drawings.

Jeremy Treadwell's insights assisted me notably in making my own critical analysis. I want to acknowledge Nick Roberts for his marking, yarns and photographs of the final work, and also Jimmy Gray (just for the photography). Lastly the Architecture ~~studio~~ Research Laboratory dwellers – too many to cite one-by-one – who offered thoughts on my work, in whatever form.

I appreciate the help from all of you in preparing this thesis.

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Where reference has not been given the figure has been drawn, compiled, photographed or otherwise reproduced originally for this text and is an original production of the author. This applies to all figures beginning with 6.— and 7.—, with the exception of fig. 6.i.

Introduction | The *anti-frame* and metaphysical spatiality.

This thesis explores a relationship between architectural space and the abstract art of the painter Mark Rothko. To establish scope, I will stress that this thesis favours an *architectural* interpretation of Rothko's work over a narrative, re-presentation of the factual content – the Art Historian's perspective – so widely available. By this I acknowledge that the role and purpose of abstraction in art is greater than the extent of this text.¹ However through the filter of architectural theory I intend to foreground the topic of space within Rothko's work. I identify that it is through a spatial reading of Rothko's art that this thesis can be best focussed toward an architectural conclusion, as opposed to attempting to address Rothko's work as a whole.

To this end there are two interconnected threads to the research. The first describes the relationship between architecture and the metaphysical spatiality within Rothko's abstract art, with a focus particularly on those paintings made in the 'classic' or 'color-field' format of late in Rothko's career (c.1950-1970). The second thread involves the German critic Walter Benjamin and will be addressed at a later point in this introduction, where its context can be better understood.

1. For example, an art-historical argument is that Rothko's use of abstraction was to communicate the fundamental dimensions of human experience – paraphrasing his own words, 'tragedy, ecstasy, and doom' – through the language of painting, which he viewed as universal. John Gage's text [2000] is one of many that can be referred to for further reading. While on the one hand this thesis is interested in the universality or immediacy of Rothko's communication for its spatial implications, the explicit reading of the ontological or psychological function of Rothko's use of colour presented by Gage, on the other hand, is not the primary aim of this work.

Space within this thesis is framed by its admittedly difficult conception as metaphysical or transcendental in nature. Within art criticism of the time – especially of Rothko, and I posit within architecture, too – ideas of metaphysicality and transcendence were (and are) often avoided or dismissed. Brice Marden [Rosenthal & Weiss, 1997: 360] argues such ideas were 'indefensible,' and subject to intellectual attack for being essentially 'too romantic.' The rise of the 'hard' aesthetic of minimalist art (concurrent with Rothko's active years) saw people turn against what Rothko felt painting could be capable of; which had 'gone out of fashion' [Marden: Rosenthal & Weiss, 1997: 359]. Yet Rothko held with an absolute, moral seriousness the position that his art could achieve a transcendent quality. This was a desire (as he is oft-quoted as having said) to 'elevate painting to the level of poignancy of music and poetry' [Rothko: Novak & O'Doherty, 2000: 266].

The influential movement of the 'New York School' of abstract painting, active in the 1950s, was marked by an absence of representational or even

2. Dore Ashton, a close friend, writes here of Rothko: '[He] was an intellectual among painters... his great task was to translate his principles into the nondiscursive language of painting with its secret emanation.'

3. Rothko's biographer, James Breslin has quoted Rothko here from a conversation with Alfred Jensen in 1953: 'Maybe you have noticed two characteristics exist in my paintings; either their surfaces are expansive and push outward in all directions, or their surfaces contract and rush inward in all directions. Between these two poles you can find everything I want say.' This indicates Rothko's belief that if there were a subject matter to be grasped in his paintings, it was beyond the constraints of the physical surfaces of his canvases in themselves.

fig. i. Barnett Newman, *Cathedral*, 1958 (Photograph: Peter A. Juley).

fig. ii. Rothko, *Untitled (White, Black, Grays on Maroon)*, 1963 (Photograph: Hickey & Robertson).

vaguely identifiable images to which viewers could relate. Without this 'anchor,' which grounded a pictorial understanding, the discourse of abstract painting shifted to embrace the idea of space as a crucial subject. These artists engaged difficult questions about the evasive nature of space as, in essence, a 'non-thing' [Auping, 2007: 135]. Writers on Rothko, in particular, have cited his ability to employ abstract painting as a 'nondiscursive language' [Ashton, 2005: 14]² to open a channel between viewer and artwork that allowed a transaction of metaphysical ideas [Breslin, 1993: 301;³ Elderfield, 2005: 101]. In other words, Rothko's language of painting became directly communicative of space, 'nondiscursively.' The aim of this thesis is to unpack the meaning of this directness in communication.

The *anti-frame*.

The first point at which a relationship between architecture and the art of Rothko can be identified is in what is introduced here as an 'anti-frame.' Through specific choices in his treatment of delimiting a pictorial plane, Rothko was able to usher in the *immaterial* or metaphysical. Jeffrey Weiss writes on how abstract painters of the time such as Barnett Newman, with his signature 'zip' paintings of the 1950s, acknowledged a 'deductive relation' to the edge of the canvas by neglecting to include a traditional strip frame [Weiss, 2005: 144].^[fig. i] Newman created what I suggest can be called a 'non-frame.' Rothko's relationship to the edge of the canvas pursued far more extreme implications [Weiss, 2005: 144]. His was a meticulous, perhaps obsessive, continuation of paint coverage right into the 'tacking edges' of his canvases – that is, the 'extra' material that would be folded and fixed to the underside of the wooden structure of the canvas. Rothko's material treatment was intended towards an uninterrupted focus on the picture plane [Mancusi-Ungaro, 2000: 290]. Beyond simply neglecting or abandoning the frame, Rothko's shift was to a purposeful and resolute effort to *invert* the effect and function of the traditional strip-frame: more severe than a 'non-frame,' it might therefore be termed an *anti-frame*.

By employing *anti-frames* Rothko denied his paintings as materially bound ^[fig. ii] Rothko aimed to communicate the 'non-thing' of space [Ernst: Auping, 2007: 137] by declaring his canvas as an *autonomous presence*, as opposed to a painted plane containing within a pictorial evocation of a fictive space [Weiss, 2005: 144]. In this act Rothko's works became not *of* space, they denied conventional view. Rather they existed in their *own* space, the space of their siting. By minimising the boundary between 'painting' and 'wall' with the *anti-frame*, the wall (and so the surrounding walls of the room) are all incorporated in the act of viewing the work [Auping, 2007: 141]. The artist Robert Ryman [Rosenthal & Weiss, 1997: 368] best phrased it when describing the viewing of this art: 'wherever [the Rothko] is, it will have an effect on the things around it, and things around it will affect it.' This is in contrast to a traditionally framed, narrative picture, which 'isolates our experience from the wall.'

Prolonged encounter and *place*.

Rothko had a desire to control the conditions in which his paintings were confronted – the arrangement of the hang, the lighting, and so on [Breslin, 1993; Fer, 2005; Novak & O'Doherty, 2000 et al]. This was an overt, wholly conscious manipulation of an encounter with his art [Fer, 2005: 164]. The most important of many reasons provided for this is that regardless of the varying tone, hues or degrees of lightness of darkness within the paintings, the effect sought was one of a prolonged encounter. This 'hypnotic moment of held attention' eventually led the viewer into 'another, mesmeric world' [Fer, 2005: 164] – that is, an absorption into a direct confrontation with the transcendental. The dormant affect within the Rothko is, in a sense, 'unlocked' through a temporal condition that considered environmental control could provide (such as that applied by Rothko).^[fig. iii] While viewing the work, the 'graying off' of the edges of the canvas in one's visual periphery allows a presence *within* the surface to appear that renders internal (physical) relationships irrelevant [Kelsey, 2005: 5]. In other words the pregnant, contemplative experience before a Rothko allows a transcendence of the physical.

fig. iii. Mark Rothko and Betty Parsons, Fourth Parsons Gallery Show, 1949 (Photograph: Aaron Siskind).

If it is true that this experience of Rothko art is 'rooted in the active relationship of observer to the painting' [Kelsey, 2005: 4], it hinges upon the idea of one's presence or *place* in relation to it. Like the work of Barnett Newman with whom Rothko is often grouped, a sense of scale its confrontation becomes important: in Newman's terms, 'the knowing you are there.' For Newman, this irreproducible sense of place is 'not only inherently mysterious but has a sense of metaphysical fact ... the problem of a painting is physical and metaphysical' [Newman, 1965]. It is here the second thread of inquiry is introduced:

Through a reading of sections of Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* [1936], I explore the hypothesis that the metaphysical, spatial qualities of Rothko's work are 'betrayed' as a consequence of their mechanical reproduction within modern media, such as within monographs or through digital representation. I follow Benjamin's own theory that *presence* within a specific time and space is a prerequisite to the understanding of artistic authenticity or 'Aura.' As this authenticity or 'aura' too is metaphysical, it exists outside the technological sphere. It exists 'outside' the limits of reproducibility [Benjamin, 1936: 220] and is 'withered' by it. This forms a premise that when one encounters a reproduction of the work of art, there is missing an encounter with an essential element of that art.

If in architecture I find the work of Rothko and the idea of 'space' analogous, then I see a similar correlation between the idea of *reproduction* and that of *representation*. In this sense this thesis forms a parallel argument to the one regarding Rothko's art and Benjamin's mechanical reproduction. It is hinged upon the notion that architectural space is in some way 'betrayed' by its representation. In its application this thesis looks to both explore that relationship as a *status quo* and challenge it through design.

An arrangement for this thesis.

This thesis is therefore structured into two main sections, with a smaller, third section for analysis, discussion and conclusions. *Section I* provides a contextual understanding of the work of Rothko, with the aim of establishing a position on the relationship between the artist and space. Chapter One firstly sets out the historical and tangentially biographical context of Rothko's placement amongst the movement of the Abstract Expressionist artists. Here the focus is on the establishing the 'color-field,' or what is now regarded Rothko's 'classic' composition. Chapter Two looks exclusively at the relationship between the artist and space through a discussion of spaces considered in close relationship with the artist: his many studios in Manhattan, New York, and three commissioned exhibitions designed and carried out specifically for architectural spaces: the Seagram Murals (1958-60), the Harvard Murals (1961-63), and the Rothko Chapel Murals (1964-70). This discussion of Rothko's studio and commissioned spaces are undertaken in parallel. By doing so the links between his working and exhibition spaces – and consequentially the relationship between the artist himself and space – become more clear.

Section II is devoted to the second thread of inquiry in a study of 'extracting' Walter Benjamin's elusive concept of Aura, as well as how that thinking might begin to translate to architectural thinking. To do this follow a short reading of Benjamin's text with four longer chapters. In each, I work inwards from the larger discourse of Rothko to provide a focused reading of his art through specific 'themes' or concepts as, in their own ways, 'abstractions' of the Aura. Each 'theme' is then addressed as a concept as relatable to Rothko's work as it is to works of other writers, artists and architects. As such, each Chapter within this section adopts as a case study external to Rothko, yet related thematically. These case studies each bring a different element of spatial inquiry to the thesis in addition to a discourse on Rothko. Chapter Three discusses the 'Chimera' alongside a *built architecture*, Tadao Ando's *Azuma House* (1976, Osaka), and the thinking of Jonathan Hill, Martin Heidegger and Jin Baek. Chapter Four explores the interrelated concepts of 'Darkness' and 'Dark Space' through an *installation artwork*, Juan Muñoz's *Double Bind* (2001, London), and the writing of Anthony Vidler. Chapter Five looks at the idea of 'Authority' through an architectural project Rothko considered a *subconscious influence*, Michelangelo's *Biblioteca Laurenziana* (1559, Florence) and texts by Norman Bryson (who cites Kitaro Nishida), and Rudolf Wittkower. Chapter Six returns to the discussion of Aura it began with with a more specific reading of Walter Benjamin as it relates to architecture, aided by the Beatriz Colomina's theory of architectural reproduction. The work of appropriation artist Sherrie Levine is explored as a critique of Benjamin before concluding with my own design work as a 'case study.' These are a series of experimental drawing and modelling studies attempting to engage with ideas in *Section II*.

Lastly, *Section III* builds upon the preparatory studies discussed at the close of the previous section to document, analyse, and critique a major design project that serves as the application through design of this thesis; a drawn experiment in spatiality underwritten in the concepts of immediacy, presence, and so 'Aura.' In itself the design work propels a series of conclusions for the thesis, and these are discussed within the discussion of the work within Chapter Seven. There is also a very short formal conclusion to the thesis that speculates a resonance of this thesis for the architectural profession.

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Figures.

figs. i – iii. Weiss, 2000: 320, 295, 229.

I | The artist and space.

In this section of the thesis, I aim to establish a foundation of understanding of Mark Rothko: the artist; his art, and its relation to spatiality, and thus its considerations for architecture. First, I make an account of the development of Rothko's 'color-field' and its spatial readings, before exploring a concurrent dialogue of sorts between the artist's spaces: those 'within' his canvases, his studios (spaces of work), and the sites (spaces of exhibition) for which he painted several late-career commissions. These spaces are more interrelated than it would initially seem.

One | *Reductio ad absurdum*: establishing the ‘color-field.’

This text begins with a short bio-historical context setting for the exploration within the remaining body of the work. As noted in my Introduction, this thesis privileges an architectural interpretation of Rothko’s work over its many art-historical readings. However, the identification of this focus still acknowledges the necessity of briefly establishing the facts. It is only by knowing what one actually sees (and, by extension, how one comes to see it) that an analysis of that perception and *conception* can take place [Bromberger, 2008: 3]. Mindful that this is an architecture thesis, I aim to restrict such art-historical narrative to the extent of the following chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the context for the inception of Rothko’s ‘color-field:’ his emergence in the New York art scene; his association (or hoped lack thereof) with the school of Abstract Expressionists; and the emergence of his classic format through an iterative *reduction*. It should also be noted that the biographical data within this chapter is purely for a background, rather than to provide an informative pathos on Rothko that might ‘taint’ interpretation of the work.^{1.1} In short, the biographical content does not render formalism irrelevant; interpretation *must* occur on these formal terms. In this respect this chapter is indebted to the formalist art criticism of Clement Greenberg (and the writers who aligned with him). It follows their repression of the external content within abstract art to discuss its direct formal appearance or presentation. What this perspective offers is an understanding of the background for Rothko’s work at a level that can provide a foundation for this thesis with respect to its architectural aims. Moving into Chapter Two (‘Space.’), this chapter concludes with a discussion on the abstracted experience of space within this classic format, analysing the act of ‘seeing’^{1.2} the works themselves to question the ways in which space ‘appears’ in Rothko’s work that would differ from any other art.

Dvinsk—New York.

Mark Rothko was born Marcus Rothkowitz in 1903 in Dvinsk, Latvia. The Rothkowitz family lived there until 1910 when patriarch Jacob immigrated to the United States with his two eldest sons to seek better fortune. In the absence of his father, the young Rothko sought his independence, ‘breaking’ from the rigorous tradition of his Dvinsk life and rejecting the synagogue [Breslin, 1993: 10-19]. Three years later the remainder of the Rothkowitz

1.1. See Svedlow, 2008: 290. In speaking of the hermeneutic phenomenology of Rothko’s work, Svedlow discusses the concept of background biographical knowledge of artists – in this case, of a romanticised, archetypal ‘tragedy’ within Rothko’s personal story – as kinds of ‘noises’ that disrupt a pure interpretation, absolving the beholder of their task.

1.2. Glenn Phillips [2005: 2-3] writes of the contradictory and irreconcilable formal characteristics of Rothko’s paintings, which invoke ‘pulsating afterimages’ in the visual field, at which point he suggests one might be authentically ‘seeing’ the Rothko. Phillips therefore suggests, that is, that there is an attentive difference between ‘looking at’ and ‘seeing’ art.

family sailed to America to meet Jacob, who shortly after died from colon cancer. Rothko, who always spoke of his father with reverence, was severely impacted by Jacob's death, which became for him an *absolute* break from his former Dvinsk life. Later, Rothko would claim that he'd 'never be able to forgive' his immigration. For Rothko, it was an unwilling transplantation to a land where he felt unwelcome and displaced, 'never at home' [Breslin, 1993: 22-25]. Still, upholding his father's belief in the rigour of academia, Rothko excelled in the American schooling system. Having spoken no English only eight years prior, by 1921 Rothko had been accepted to Yale University on a scholarship, spurring a move from Portland to New Haven, Connecticut and into the Ivy League [Breslin, 1993: 34-47].

Despite earning the respect of his peers at Yale, Rothko grew scornful of the upper class and particularly of the anti-semitic Yale establishment [Breslin, 1993: 46-47]. Feeling strongly that Yale privileged rigid social systems over a sense of truthful, intellectual rigour, Rothko made his final break: to quit college in 1923 [Breslin, 1993: 50-54]. Rothko's move to New York City was, in his own words, to 'wander around, bum about, starve a bit' [Rothko: Breslin, 1993: 54], but having earlier visited a friend at the Art Students League, the shift was perhaps more about considering a career in the arts. Ultimately, Rothko enrolled in the New School of Design in 1925 and later at Max Weber's Art Students League, where he would initiate what little formalised training he had for his career as a painter [Breslin, 1993: 54-56].

1.3. Anna Chave [1989: 2] notes the telling use of secular or religious terminology within art criticism to describe the Abstract Expressionists, and the tendency for the lionisation of this group of painters as crusaders against the European Modern Art establishment: 'if these artists were saintly,' she writes, 'they were warrior saints.'

1.4 In 1944 Jackson Pollock [Chave: 1989: 4] vocalised the American sentiment toward this perceived essentiality, quote: 'I don't see why the problems of modern painting can't be solved as well here as elsewhere.'

fig. 1.i. *The Irascibles*, 1951 (Photograph: Nina Leen). Rothko is seated, far right.

The New York School.

Rothko was soon considered together with a group of modern artists known as the Abstract Expressionists, or the 'New York School,' whose work critics 'piously' lauded [Chave, 1989: 2-3]^{1.3} for their 'break' from the tradition of European Modern art. This group – which included names that henceforth gained significant renown: Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, and Jackson Pollock among others – was credited for de-centering the modern art establishment (previously centred on the 'European masters': Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian *et al* [Chave, 1989: 2]). The American artistic zeitgeist of the time was one of *disinterest* with its historical center of significance, Paris, where any striving artist would make an essential sojourn.^{1.4}

At the height of their infamy, the common view of the New York School was one of a very unified group of artists with a similarly unified purpose; an American equivalent to the European School of Paris.^(fig. 1.i) This was a misnomer, undermining the very distinct artists within the group. Each had 'remarkably dissimilar visions': the artists ranged in age and descent (many were themselves European) and in levels of formal training [Chave, 1989: 3-4]. Insofar as the group had a common ground it was the City, New York itself, and thus the moniker of a 'New York School' is geographically coincidental; per-

haps nothing more. To counteract the heterogeneity of a New York 'School,' critics attempted to identify in it two distinct styles: the contemplative 'color-field' painting (Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman) and the kinetic, unruly, even violent 'action' painting (of which Jackson Pollock's work is the best example).

Conversely, there were two qualities that did mark a coherence within the group. First was a *directness* in approach to communicative painting that was critical to their break from the European tradition (categorised by a highly sophisticated state of finish). Underscoring this immediacy was a debt the New York School artists owed to the Surrealist tradition, particularly their 'automatic' working method undiluted by conscious thought^(fig. 1.ii) [Chave, 1989: 8; Bromberger, 2008: 15]. The second unifying quality within the School was the formation of 'signature' images or compositions which became highly individualised to each artist. This was particularly so in the work of Jackson Pollock (with his signature drips), Barnett Newman (with his signature zips) and, of course, Mark Rothko.^(fig. 1.iii)

Reductio ad absurdum: a 'Rothko.'

In the arrival at *Rothko's* 'signature' composition, there are four stages in which his progression can be loosely categorised. Between 1920 and the late 1930s, Rothko painted recognisable figures: landscapes, urban scenes and human figures [Bromberger, 2008: 14-15]. These gave way to a period in the early 1940s where he would *reduce* his means and paint surrealist figures with mythical allusions. While formally recognisable, these lacked the direct, worldly reference of his early work. The blurred brushstrokes employed by the artist throughout these works [Bromberger, 2008: 14-15] precursored yet *another* reduction in means to his late-1940s 'multiform' paintings: compositions of abstract shapes of colour, indistinct in their edges and lacking in concrete relationships to each other.^(fig. 1.iv) By the 1950s Rothko had removed mimetic allusion entirely to reach a culminating reduction of his formal framework: two or more indistinct, 'planar expanses of color' stacked upon each other, seeming never to reach the edge of the canvases, nor the ground layer of paint they were overlaid upon. These blurred, softly-edged bands of transparent color (and thus light) existed in perpetual relational tension with one another [Bromberger, 2008: 8-16], of a scale and quality that would induce beholders into a state of utter attentive commitment [Compton, 1988: 10]. This became known as Rothko's 'color-field' format.

Rothko repeated this composition for the last two decades of his career, altering the scale and quantity of the 'fields' and canvases but never this basic framework.^{1.5} For his historians this indicated he had realised a potential poignancy or resonance within it [Bromberger, 2008: 8; Chave, 1989: 12]. That any talk today of artworks comparing to 'a Rothko' immediately draws upon this image of stacked color-fields is testament to both the overwhelming response to the paintings made in this format and their critical endurance. Rather than see his repeated reduction as a strategy for *obscuring*, it was to serve the purpose

fig. 1.ii. Ashille Gorky and Isamu Noguchi, *Hitler Invades Poland*, 1939.

Gorky's early work contains characteristics of both Surrealist automatic drawing, and the Abstract Expressionist painting it would influence.

1.5. Briony Fer's essay [2005] further elaborates on the issue of Rothko's repetition within painting, making several useful insights into his artistic patterns. In particular, she writes of Rothko's use of repetition as a way of demanding a particular mode of attention, quoting the artist: 'if a thing is worth doing once, it is worth doing over and over again – exploring it, probing it, demanding by this repetition that the public look at it.' [Rothko: Fer, 2005: 161].

fig. 1.iii. (Top down) Jackson Pollock, *Lavender Mist*, 1950; Barnett Newman, *The Promise*, 1949; Mark Rothko, *White Center*, 1951.

fig. 1.iv. (Top down) Mark Rothko, *Entrance to the Subway (Subway Scene)*, 1938; *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, 1944; *No. 1 (No. 18, 1948)*, 1948-1949.

of clarity: a removal of the 'obstacles' between the painter and the work, and thus the work and the viewer; 'obstacles' that stood in the way of immediate, direct communication [Breslin, 1993: 241-246]. Parallel in Rothko's persona was a growing reluctance to talk about his work, abandoning even titles for his canvases, 'as if any words' would disrupt from a 'necessarily uneasy confrontation' with the simplicity of his work [Breslin, 1993: 241-246].

Clement Greenberg [1955] used the latin term *reductio ad absurdum* (literally, reduction to the absurd) to describe patterns in the work emerging from the New York School. Greenberg employed this term within art criticism, despite its natural use in law or mathematics to indicate (loosely) a proof by contradiction. Yet it is poetically employed to describe Rothko's color-fields, which, through their extreme reduction of one mode of experience had contradictorily amplified another ('other') mode of experience. This phenomenon was not without historical precedent. Robert Rosenblum wrote of the Romantic painter Caspar David Freidrich, who with his *Monk by the Sea* (1808-1810) ^[fig. 1.iv] depicted an overpowering environment *distilled* to so primal a condition that the 'mythic' experience was evoked through viewing it. Freidrich reduced his elementary composition and saturation to such extremes that viewers were located 'near the precipice of nothingness' [Rosenblum: Bromberger, 2008: 5-6]. A century later, Rothko echoed Friedrich by producing work of similar experiential dimensions in his color-field composition.

Intending experience.

A painting is not a picture of an experience; it is an experience.

—*Mark Rothko* [Chave, 1989: 172].

The spectator will always understand more than the artist intended, and the artist will always have intended more than any single spectator understands.

—*Richard Wollheim* [Chave, 1989: 29].

The lack of communal (universal) response to Rothko's work lies in the highly subjective territory of what is thought to be his 'subject matter': *experience* itself [Chave, 1989]. While most agree that the viewing of a Rothko is synonymous with a significant perceptual/bodily affect, few are able to locate precisely what that affect might be [Phillips, 2005: 1], and this has led to its many, disparate interpretations.^{1.6} Of the points of consensus there are, it is agreed that the experience is *literally spatial* – insistent on presence in front of the canvas. This is because there are qualities to the work that photographic reproduction fails to convey: most obviously, scale; but also the overlapping of colours and the nuances of inflexion and texture on the canvas surface [Phillips, 2005: 2, Chave, 1989: 12]. Phillips [2005: 1] has proposed that Rothko's anxiety with creating precise viewing environments for his works supports the idea that it is only successful when the 'loop' is closed through the presence of a viewer, which

fig. 1.v. Caspar David Freidrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1808-1810.

1.6. Glenn Phillips [2005: 1] surveys the varying responses to Rothko's painting: 'Rothko's work has been variously described as transcendental, tragic, mystical, violent, or serene; as representative of the void; as opening to the experience of the sublime; as exhilaratingly intellectual; or as profoundly spiritual – to mention just a few examples.'

then generates an affective experience. Critical response to Rothko has shifted over time (as John Gage noted [2000: 247]), to where the immediate question of ‘what’ his canvases were about is displaced by more historical questions: ‘how?’ or ‘why?’ These are questions this thesis aims to address.

For others, the ‘Rothko’ is *perceptually spatial* – insistent on spatiality ‘within’ the canvas. With the color-field format, Rothko subverted readings of space by manipulating (and often eliminating) the traditional means of determining spatiality: the overlapping of forms, atmospheric deterioration, shading, and perspective [Kosoi: 2005]. Rothko distrusted pictorial illusionism within painting.^{1.7} For him, it was a *representation of space*, whereas he preferred the perceptual spatiality of the undeniably two dimensional: ‘flat forms... destroy illusion and reveal truth’ [Rothko: Chave, 1989: 28]. While Rothko was well-versed in *line* (as his early and surrealist paintings indicated), he ultimately felt it ‘distracted’ from what he had to communicate. The reductive means of light and colour stood then as a kind of clarity or ‘truth’ for the artist [Gage, 2000: 247]. Rothko had rejected the Cubist ‘geometric vocabulary’ for a new conception of abstract, atmospheric space created by the ‘flattened, spreading expanses of light, color and plane’ [Rosenblum, 1961: 244]. Space within Rothko’s color-field thus returns to its metaphysical appearance; its ability very directly convey an understanding or empathy with the *absurd reduction* of ‘abstract’ form [Bromberger, 2008: 29]. Rothko himself expressed that:

In terms of the desire for the frontal, for the unveiled, for the experienced surface, I would say that my pictures have space. That is in the expression of making clear the obscure or metaphysically of making close the remote.

[Rothko, 1954].

Where art prior to Abstract Expressionism was interested in the depiction or representation *of space*, Rothko’s art aimed for ‘the frontal, the unveiled.’ In other words, for Rothko, his painting *was* spatial. He aimed to make close this ‘remote’ idea, for his art to evoke the presence and power of the spatial encounter [Bromberger, 2008: 32]. Chapter Two will build upon this characteristic, to discuss how this conception of a spatial art confronts the architectural context.

1.7. See also Weiss, 2005: 144 and the Introduction to this text, where the ‘illusionism’ to which Rothko refers is more clearly defined as ‘a pictorial evocation of a fictive space.’

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Figures.

- fig. 1.i. Weiss, 2000: 340.
- fig. 1.ii. *Surrealism USA*, 2005: 108.
- fig. 1.iii. (Top down) Arnason, 1988: 399; Auping, 2007: 85; Weiss, 2000: 107.
- fig. 1.iv. Weiss, 2000: (L-R) 33, 53, 85.
- fig. 1.v. Anderson, 2003: 102.

Two | Space.

Brian O'Doherty, an artist and a critic, once made the following observation on viewing Rothko's work in exhibition:

Before a [Jackson] Pollock, people wander to and fro. Before a Rothko each finds a spot appropriate to his own size and tends to stay there, or leave and return. It is uncanny to watch this. The picture eventually locates the spectator at a particular distance.

[O'Doherty: Elderfield, 2005: 102-103].

This observation suggests that the Rothko has an effect on the spaces of its siting, and both behaviourally and experientially over its beholders. Having positioned Mark Rothko's color-field in the greater context of the Abstract Expressionist movement, this chapter examines it exclusively against real, *literal* spaces, addressing the space *external* to the color-field as opposed to that *within* it. Not simply a neglect of the color-field to focus on its container, this chapter is an *extension* of the analysis of the color-field in addressing a relationship to its physical, architectural surroundings, and can be viewed as an alternative reading to the formalist approach of the previous chapter. Consequentially, conclusions emerge on the relationship to space shared by the artist himself in summation of the aims for this section of the thesis.

To achieve this I concentrate on those architectural spaces related closely to Rothko's art: his many New York studios and, in parallel, his spaces of exhibition. Specifically, these are a series of commissioned murals for the Four Seasons restaurant at the Seagram Building, New York (1958-60); the Holyoke dining room at Harvard University, Cambridge (1962-63) and finally, the chapel in Houston, Texas posthumously consecrated the Rothko Chapel (1964-70). Intertwining the two analyses chronologically allows a dialogue between his spaces of work, the formal stylistic shifts in his painting, and his spaces of exhibition to reveal itself.

1952-56: The separate studio and 'saturating' space.

Early in 1952, Rothko for the first time separated his place of dwelling from his place of work. His rented loft at 106 West 53rd St. in Manhattan, New York was the first of five such isolated studios Rothko occupied over the remainder of his career [Breslin, 1993: 313-314]. For the first time, the question of scale can be raised when considering the his work against the spaces of their creation. Prior to 1952, Rothko worked on large canvases within the confined rooms of his 6th Avenue apartment. He felt that large canvases – cre-

ating a certain spatially proportionate relationship to the room – could more easily ‘saturate’ the smaller space with their effect, the walls ‘defeated’ by the presence of the canvases. Despite their significant size Rothko maintained they were ‘painted in a scale of normal living rather than an institutional scale,’ precisely to achieve this effect [Breslin, 1993: 313-314].

In stark contrast to his confined apartment, Rothko’s new studio was of generous proportions.^[fig 2.i] Long, high and narrow, the space contained few openings in the rear, which was used for storage and preparation, while the north wall featured floor-to-ceiling windows [Breslin, 1993: 313-314]. Having grown accustomed to painting and displaying his works within confined spaces – scaled to a specific proportional relationship of art to container – the new spatial dimensions consequentially affected Rothko’s approach to painting. The desired ‘saturation’ of his work undoubtedly diminished in ‘reach’ with the increase in the space of their creation. Yet being only human, Rothko was restricted to a certain degree of physical exertion – and so a limited size of canvas – in the production of his paintings. The separation of dwelling and studio thus had greater ramifications to Rothko’s *oeuvre* than simply allowing the artist to concentrate without the distractions of the household [Breslin, 1993: 313-315]. Rothko would require a shift in formal means in order to maintain such spatial affect. This idea will be returned to later in this chapter.

fig. 2.i. Rothko in his West 53rd St. studio, 1953 (Photograph: Henry Elkan).

2.1. Rothko painted dark paintings intermittently throughout his career until 1958, but the Seagram commission marks a stylistic break in his *oeuvre* where Rothko henceforth maintained a consistency with darker output. See Novak & O’Doherty, 2000.

fig. 2.ii. Rothko in his 222 Bowery studio, 1960 (Photograph: Herbert Matter).

1958-60: The Seagram murals/ 222 Bowery.

Following a brief occupancy at 104 West 61st St. from 1956-1958, Rothko changed studio again to co-incide with the acceptance of a commission to paint for the Four Seasons restaurant within Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram building. This commission came at a critical point in Rothko’s mature career, though many aspects of its initiation and Rothko’s infamous subsequent withdrawal remain either uncertain or unreliably relayed [Compton, 1988: 10]. Notwithstanding these accounts of their inception, the facts remain: the Seagram murals marked the first sustained turn in Rothko’s painting to a darker palette,^{2,1} and the first works of art designed for display within a specific three-dimensional space [Rosenthal, 2007: 57].

Rothko was very conscious of the spatial specificity of his newest works, as the occupation of his newest studio proved. Rothko’s studio at 222 Bowery was a ‘cavernous’ space in the gymnasium of a former YMCA building, in the Lower East Side in Manhattan [Breslin, 1993: 3-4]. This new space was even bigger than the last: 46’ x 32’ x 23’, with great, large windows. Rothko kept the space *very* dark despite the architectural proportions. To achieve this, he plasterboarded off the western windows and partitioned areas for storage to block further light into the interior.^[fig. 2.ii] This created a cathedral-like effect of illumination into the space from high, producing an ‘exalted, even sacred character’ that Rothko preferred [Breslin, 1993: 3-4]. In this space, Rothko assembled scaffolding to approximate the interior of the Four Seasons, for which he would paint.

A moveable partition wall was constructed in the north of the studio, where a pulley system allowed Rothko to adjust the height of his canvases to determine the hang best suited to the effect he wanted to achieve [Breslin, 1993: 3-4, 381-382]. This suggests, firstly, that Rothko had a pre-occupation with the relationship his murals would share with the literal spaces of their exhibition. Secondly, it suggests that such a preoccupation was not limited to the physical (height, position), but extended to the atmospheric qualities afforded to the space: the dim illumination, the volume, and so forth. Rothko was famously quoted [Breslin, 1993: 4] as having described his Seagram murals to Dore Ashton, a friend, by declaring: 'They are not pictures. I have made a place.' By all accounts of his 222 Bowery studio, Rothko was not just referring to the murals themselves, rather the holistic environment created through the interaction between his work and their architectural context.

Portals.

The Seagram murals witnessed the formal stylistic shift Rothko required to 'saturate' spaces of a scale first posed by his 53rd St. studio. The specific room for which Rothko would paint in the Four Seasons was a raised, smaller dining space overlooking the main restaurant, three feet below.^[fig. 2.iii] Rothko quickly realised that these new paintings would no longer be encountered in the intimate manner he was accustomed to, where the viewer could confront the work as if a mirror. Rather, looking into the space from the main dining room below gave Rothko's room the visual impact of a proscenium: raised above the heads of the diners, his murals would be perceived not as paintings, but as architecture [Compton, 1988: 11-12]. In response, Rothko altered his composition through two powerful gestures to ensure the murals were capable of a 'transmission' across the vast expanse of the Four Seasons. First, Rothko rotated the orientation of his canvas to accommodate the expanded width of the murals. Secondly, Rothko included opening(s) within his color-fields, offering the motif of a frame or a portal [Compton, 1988: 12; Rosenthal, 2007: 57; Weiss, 2000: 318].^[fig. 2.iv] James Breslin [Weiss, 2000: 318] wrote of this motif as a reference to the drama of threshold, the simultaneous point of entry and exclusion. Aided by the dark palette (of deep maroons, intense reds and black), which had an 'enveloping' character, the motif for Breslin was 'ultimately claustrophobic' – where the color-fields offered an infinite space within,^{2.2} the portals posed an ultimate *denial* of a realm beyond the wall. In altering his format Rothko generated an environment in which the 'spaces' *within* the color-field began to spatially 'transact' with the greater space *external* to the color-field: a kind of transcendental architecture that Rothko sited within the experiential realm of each beholder.

Modulation and ensemble.

With regards to this thesis, the most relevant of the speculations for Rothko's acceptance of the Seagram commission was his attraction to the idea of creating a completely unified set of works – an *ensemble* – that could work together

fig. 2.iii. The *Four Seasons*, 1960. Rothko's intended dining room.

fig. 2.iv. Sketch for [Seagram Mural] 'No. 6'. Mark Rothko, *Black on Maroon*, 1958.

2.2. Weiss [2000: 329] cites Rothko's work in reference to 'a spatial infinity that occupies no more room than the artist's studio.'

2.3. Extensively well documented is Rothko's fascination with music and his preference for the classical (musical) composition as an art form. See, for instance, Breslin, 1993.

to create a consistent effect^(fig. 2.v) [Compton, 1988: 10]. According to Dore Ashton [2005: 21], Rothko was pleased with the prospect of asserting a sense of modulation, as would a musical composer,^{2,3} over his works. As his assistant Dan Rice noted [Breslin, 1993: 382], Rothko spent long periods considering the most effective spatial composition for the series. For this commission Rothko repeated a sombre arrangement (consisting of a frame or portal over a ground) with minor variations, while still maintaining a sense of formal unity between the works.^(fig. 2.vi) These subtle differences in surface required a period of acclimatisation to both the space and the artwork as an integrated ensemble – in other words, the creation of such groupings was for Rothko a more sophisticated means for prolonging the encounter with his art [Fer, 2008: 170].

After Rothko withdrew from the Seagram commission, it remained his insistence that the panels be exhibited together. His condition for gifting the commission to the Tate Gallery, Liverpool in 1965 was that the murals 'shall be a group which shall establish a mood' [Rothko: Compton, 1988: 15]. For Rothko, they had a critically spatial quality that individual exhibition threatened. In 1996, Brice Marden perhaps best described the impact of Rothko's ensembles:

The room seemed a little small for the tall canvases, but I thought that it worked in that they were shown hanging in pairs. You could distinctly see which one went with the other one, and how Rothko was thinking. Because of the tightness and the height of the room, it was an incredible experience, like being in the redwoods. The artist's ambition was very moving.

[Marden: Rosenthal & Weiss, 1997: 358].

Rothko's production of ensembles was driven by an awareness of the relationship between his art and their physical context [Breslin, 1993: 467]. This spatial sensitivity continued to develop through the two further space-specific commissions accepted before his death.

1962-63: The Harvard murals/ 1485 First Ave.

In March 1962, Rothko again moved his studio uptown, this time to 1485 First Ave., Manhattan. Again, this coincided with a commission for paintings for a particular space, this time a series for the Holyoke Center dining room at Harvard University, Cambridge. Again, Rothko approximated the architectural space of exhibition within his studio through a combination of scaffolding and partition walls [Breslin, 1993: 451]. Having identified such patterns in Rothko's behaviour, one could suggest that perhaps the commissions themselves instigated Rothko's shifts in studio space.

Rothko's First Ave. studio was a place of autonomy, a place of solitude and sometimes for the exhibition of his works to close friends. In this sense, the studio became a type of 'idealised gallery' for the artist [Breslin, 1993: 451]. In his studio, exhibition could occur without the privileging of the gallery space over his 'working' space [O'Doherty, 2007: 4-5]. Rothko was begin-

fig. 2.v. *Maquettes for installation of Seagram Murals at Tate Gallery, Tate Archive Collection, 1969.*

fig. 2.vi. *Seagram Murals as installed at the Tate Modern, London, 2008 (Photograph: Tate Photography, Marcus & Marcella Leith).*

fig. 2.vii. Lucas Samaras, *Bedroom 1*, installation at Green Gallery, New York, 1964 (Photograph: Pace Wildenstein, New York).

2.4. See O'Doherty, 2007: 4-5. Brian O'Doherty introduces this piece – where Lucas Samaras moved all his studio belongings into the Green Gallery and exhibited it as art – as a beginning point for a further discussion on the relationship, for artists, between studio and gallery.

ning to challenge the distinction between – and exclusivity of – his studio and exhibition spaces, in the same way that two years later the artist Lucas Samaras would superimpose the workspace and the gallery more decisively and absolutely, with his 'Bedroom 1' installation (Green Gallery, New York, 1964) (fig. 2.vii) [O'Doherty, 2007: 4-5].^{2.4} The collapsing of work and exhibition spaces – so typically discrete for most artists – is an idea that will be returned to further on in this chapter.

The room isn't something you command.

Five in all, the Harvard murals continued the style Rothko developed for the Seagram commission: expansive compositions of a dark palette not dissimilar to the famous Harvard crimson. Again, Rothko offered openings within the color-field, repeating the motif of the frame. Taller, narrower, more austere and unforgiving than the Seagram commission, the murals for Breslin were reminiscent of classical architecture: elegant, monumental, with a simplicity and gravity that was almost religious [Breslin, 1993: 452]. (fig. 2.viii) In isolation, the murals seemed time-less and static. Once an occupant entered the space, the murals changed: no longer static, the spatial system altered the nature of the paintings so that they engaged the viewer in a dynamic, *physical* process of interaction [Breslin, 1993: 452]. Attempts to consume or absorb the paintings individually, or in sequence, were thrown into discord by the proportions and scale of both the art and the space, and the intrusion of both into the beholder's visual periphery. Breslin's powerful phrasing of this phenomenon is worth quoting at length:

The room isn't something you command. You are inside it, a body moving inside it, lingering, adopting not one but multiple vantage points. Unity is not something accomplished by the artist and then handed over to the viewer, like a tree falling in a forest that makes noise even when no one is there to hear it. Unity is something the viewer struggles to make and, given the impossibility of examining all five paintings at once, never accomplishes.

[Breslin, 1993: 453].

Within the openings of the murals themselves are further ambiguous boundaries. They describe not pictorial vistas but instead pictorial 'vacancies' that are in a state of perceptual slippage, that simultaneously draw the viewer outside of the room and 'invade, intrude, *push into*' the literal space bound by the four walls [Breslin, 1993: 453]. They create a space that both expands and contracts – that quality once attributed to the color-fields autonomously – within the greater space of the Holyoke Center dining room.

The space itself exists in such slippage, 'either *prior to* or *beyond* our familiar world of bounded objects.' In other words, the physical architecture is transformed through Rothko's art into an experientially transcendental space: a *place* made from 'simple, elementary forms that will not stay *in place*.' [Breslin, 1993: 453]. The creation of not just an art, but a *place* was a quality Rothko tested with the Harvard murals, however not until his final commission was it pushed to a culmination.

fig. 2.viii. Harvard Murals as installed at the Holyoke Dining Room, Cambridge, 1963-1964 (Photograph: Harvard University Art Museum).

1964-70: The Rothko Chapel murals/ The last studio.

Rothko moved to his newest and final studio at 157 East 69th St. in 1964. By then any doubts could be erased as to his motives. The studio was *specifically chosen* for a series commissioned by Dominique and Jean de Menhil, art collectors from Houston, Texas [Breslin, 1993: 47]. Rothko had by now admitted to growing tired of easel painting. He welcomed the space-specific commissions that the Seagram and Harvard murals – and now the de Menhil Chapel commission – represented [Rosenthal, 2007: 58]. This attitudinal shift underscores the set of spatial ideas held by Rothko's art I have developed so far in this thesis. Rothko's artistic arc begun with the metaphysically spatial ideas of the early color-fields, shifting over time into the literally spatial constructs of architecture, yet the latter remaining in a reciprocal relation to the former.

fig. 2.ix. Barnstone & Aubry, *The Rothko Chapel*, 1970. Plan.

2.5. For instance, Breslin [1993: 470] compares Rothko's East 69th St. Studio particularly with the emergence of Andy Warhol's Factory at the time, highlighting how the two exist at completely opposite ends of the cultural spectrum: Warhol's Factory a busy cultural mecca, and Rothko's 19th century carriage house a place of quiet solitude.

fig. 2.x. Rothko in his East 69th St studio, 1964 (Photography: Hans Namuth).

The unbuilt chapel (posthumously be consecrated 'the Rothko Chapel') allowed Rothko an unprecedented involvement in the creation of both the paintings and the space they would be exhibited in. Rothko worked closely with the architect of the chapel, then Philip Johnson (who had also designed the Four Seasons), however his views regarding the space were so insistent that the working relationship faltered and Johnson was forced to leave. Howard Barnstone (Johnson's colleague) and his partner Eugene Aubry were then brought in to see out the remainder of the project to its completion [Barnes, 1989: 84; Breslin, 1993: 467].^[fig 2.ix] Despite this, the true architect of the chapel remained perhaps Rothko himself.

Rothko's last studio was chosen to accommodate the (now customary) approximation of the exhibition space within its confines. 157 East 69th St. was a 2½ storey, 19th century carriage house on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The building itself was split into two halves, Rothko occupying the left as a sparsely furnished living space (contrary to the busy, cluttered spaces of many other artists).^{2.5} In the rear was a private riding rink, inside which Rothko prepared the chapel paintings. The enormous space – 40' square, with 30' high walls, an exposed ceiling and a central skylight [Breslin, 1993: 466-467] – allowed Rothko to set out partition walls in the octagonal plan he'd committed Philip Johnson to for the chapel.^[fig 2.x] After a long period of painting while the chapel was in design, Rothko insisted on a similar central skylight as that in his studio to be included within the chapel itself. For Breslin, this indicated that Rothko was modeling the exhibition space on the *studio*, and not vice versa (as for the Seagram and Harvard commissions) [Breslin, 1993: 467]. More conclusively, I argue that at this stage in his career, Rothko held certain unwavering ideals about space. His studio and the spaces he painted for became one and the same. In seeking to 'defeat' the architecture of his art's siting [Elderfield, 2005, Breslin, 1993 et al], that architecture became enveloped within the art itself, and conversely, the art would posit itself *as* architecture as a total, experiential field.

Taking this theory into consideration, we can understand with a greater poignancy Breslin's view that the studio – here proposed to be a continuation of; or *insertion into* the exhibition space – 'was no longer a space he worked in, but a space he worked on.' [Breslin, 1993: 467].^{2.6} Moreover, we could consider Brian O'Doherty's assertion [2007: 5] that the gallery's relationship to the artists' studio is one of a 'quoting' of the workspace: a highlighting of the best work, but where as a consequence one is always 'searching' for the artist in the gallery. More than simply arguing that Rothko reversed such hierarchies, his encompassing commissions covered in this chapter represent not a 'quote' from the studio at all, but the translation of an entire spatial and experiential system: a complete insertion of the artist into space.

2.6. Here Breslin is quoting Pierre Schneider, who wrote the same of the late Henri Matisse. See Breslin, 1993: 467.

Isolation, estrangement and anxiety: an interactive system.

David Anfam, Rothko's cataloguist and longtime critic, wrote on the chapel that Rothko considered having the visitor approach the space by way of a tunnel, though this was ultimately abandoned. Further through his text, Anfam describes the actual experience:

To enter the Rothko Chapel is itself an experience that involves a dramatic transition from light to shade. No matter how dull the day outside ... the chapel's interior possesses its own tenebrous atmosphere that issues from the murals and from how they relate together as an encompassing whole

[Anfam, 1996: 6].

Anfam describes a sense of *estrangement* one experiences upon entering the chapel that demands from each occupant a different mode of attention than they are accustomed to exerting [Anfam, 1996: 6].^{2.7} This effect is both the paintings and the architecture working as an 'interactive system' [Weiss, 2000: 320; Anfam, 1996: 7] to 'isolate' the occupant, to heighten their receptiveness to a transcendent experience. For Anfam, the impression this gives is often one of a descent into the space even though this is not literally (*physically*) the case, a testament to the chapel's 'unusual magnetism' [Anfam, 1996: 6]. The idea of 'descent' into space can be read as a removal from the physical space of our known understanding (the world above earth encompassing this realm). It is therefore a simultaneous insertion into the metaphysical space of transcendence that I have thus far argued was a critical component of Rothko's *oeuvre*. Anfam and Weiss suggest that Rothko, as 'architect,' was able to successfully convey this descent through a metaphysical construct or system, thus the *physical* descent that the tunnel would establish was therefore deemed ultimately unnecessary.

2.7. See also Elderfield, 2005: 102 who in his description of Rothko's art also refers to an 'overpowering strangeness.'

The chapel paintings were Rothko's starkest and most bare to date. The massive, monolithic canvases were painted in dark plum grounds, ^{fig. 2.xi} and where included, their deep black expanses (color-fields) within stopped very short of the edges. The paintings were presented either alone or in triptychs, distributed around a simple, octagonal plan with the aforementioned central

fig. 2.xi. Mark Rothko, *North Apse Triptych*, 1970.

fig. 2.xii. The Rothko Chapel, Houston (Photograph: Hickey & Robertson).

skylight naturally illuminating the space from above.^[fig. 2.xii] The spatial experience of the paintings themselves is extended into their closely related cognitive experience through the 'site-writing' of the poet and critic David Antin [2003]. Antin's use of phrasing and pause allow the reader more directly into the witness of the Chapel:

*its inescapable i turned around and looked... the very curious
nature of the paintings with an apparent similarity to each other in
their degree of darkness that were still not quite the same how
similar were the panels?... its hard to tell because you cant look at
them at the same time*

[Antin, 2003: 126-127].

Further, Antin alludes to the phenomenon discussed earlier in this chapter regarding the Harvard commission: a sense of 'surrender' of the user to the spatial system through the impossibility of a 'complete' experience the art. Only in 'reducing' this one mode of experience, an 'other' mode is amplified. In recounting his attempts to compare the paintings, Antin writes of the effect of the scale and arrangement of the works against the geometry of the architecture:

*i kept trying to figure out how i could master the space but because
this is a wrap around installation all you can do is go up and look
closely at the individual panels and try to remember them as you retreat to
a distance at which you can take in three walls at a time... all the
time struggling to remember exactly what it is that youve seen*

[Antin, 2003: 128].

Antin forefronts a heightened sense of anxiety in experiencing the Rothko Chapel, a cumulative urgency that is rooted in the architectural system but built through his words. Antin's textual description (which becomes cognitive and then spatial through the imaginary it activates), is perhaps then a truer reproduction of the experience of Rothko's art than visual reproduction, completely devoid of any visual stimuli. This indeed could be in reference to how 'imageless' Rothko's work had become by this late stage in his career. It is testament to the Rothko Chapel project as an artist affirming his work as 'something beyond or outside art.'^{2.8} [Novak & O'Doherty, 2000: 273-274].

2.8. Later in Art Historical chronology, Minimalist art (sculpture) would similarly become known for 'threatening' the autonomy of the art object – that is, the functioning of the art within itself and in independence from its context [Bishop, 2005: 53]. As compounded by the multiple studies within this Chapter, it described a 'threat' to art's autonomy that was a quality persistent within Rothko's *oeuvre*. Because it falls out of the scope of this thesis both chronologically and in content, I have not engaged in any explicit further discussion on Rothko's legacy on minimalist art.

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Figures.

- fig. 2.i. Weiss, 2000: 344.
- figs. 2.ii & 2.iii. Borchardt-Hume (ed.), 2008: 18 & 17.
- fig. 2.iv. Compton, 1988: 22.
- figs. 2.v & 2.vi. Borchardt-Hume (ed.), 2008: 143 & 98.
- fig. 2.vii. Bishop, 2005: 29.
- fig. 2.viii. Weiss, 2000: 347.
- fig. 2.ix. Barnes, 1989: 85.
- fig. 2.x. Barnes, 1989: 49; Weiss, 2000: 351.
- figs. 2.xi & 2.xii. Barnes, 1989: 73 & 88.

'I adhere to the material reality of the world and the substance of things.'

II | Thematic extraction: abstracting ‘*Aura*.’

Having established a context for the thesis within Section I, this section provides a closer reading of the theory and discourse on Rothko as a transition toward the application of Rothko’s spatial thinking to Architecture.

Taking Walter Benjamin’s concept of the ‘Aura’ of the original work of art (and its relationship to the idea of reproduction) as a conceptual framework, this section explores through ‘thematically’-specific Chapters the ways in which the ‘Aura’ makes its appearance. Firstly, I establish my interpretation of the ‘Aura’ in a short preface, through a reading of Benjamin’s essay, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [1936], before ‘abstracting’ his descriptions through addressing specific metaphysical ideas – Chimera, Darkness, Authority – that are not only available within a discourse on Rothko but also within the field of spatial thinking. In closing this Section I return to the Benjaminian ideas raised in the preface with a more focussed and specific architectural analysis.

Each Chapter thus contains a ‘case study’ to provide an undercurrent of spatial thinking to supplement the theory. These range and vary: from art installations to built projects, and finally my own design experiments, which form a series of preparatory studies for the architectural design project discussed in Section III.

Preface to Section II | Aura.

I preface the following section of the thesis with a discussion of Walter Benjamin's concept of 'Aura' and a reading of his essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* [1936]. This is to establish a level of understanding for the concepts underlying the following chapters. In themselves they are semi-autonomous (thematically), but they have a degree of autonomy together as a section through the ideas discussed below. This preface, together with Chapter Six, thus bookend this section of the thesis with the aim of working towards that cohesion. It is not intended to form conclusions in itself, rather to set up a conceptual framework with which the reader can engage with the following chapters; and in closing define their scope.

What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be.

—Walter Benjamin [Costello, 2005: 172].

Benjamin's own definition for his concept of an artwork's 'Aura' purposefully offers very little conclusively. Rather it is framed in such a way – simply a 'strange weave of space and time' – in order to invoke an intuitive element in its reception. This suggests that the 'structure of experience' (as opposed to the 'content of any particular experience') is what is most important to Benjamin's work [Costello, 2005: 172-173]. Benjamin's definition is ambiguous in-and-of itself, but this very ambiguity in his description by nature allows it to become a precise, accurate description of what 'Aura,' actually, is. Colin Lang suggests [2007: 3] that a way to deal with this problem is to consider Aura not as a singular concept, but rather a 'shifting code for several crucial terms within Benjamin's investigation.' In a way, I aim for the following chapters (which form this section) to act similarly; to propose several points on the Aura's 'spectrum' that allow moments of its understanding: if not the 'whole,' then a sense of the whole.

What follows is a brief reading of Benjamin's 1936 essay on art, in which Aura plays a central part. At this point, the link between art and architecture has not yet been explicitly stated, so I will do so by employing Jonathan Hill's thinking [2006]. Hill defines the act of 'touch' as what undermines the status of art as an idea, 'anchoring it to the material world.' In contrast, architecture has a tactile element (through use) that forefronts its essential materiality. This

aspect in architecture both limits and works against the argument Hill puts forward [2006: 51] that ideas have a superiority to matter. To reaffirm the status of the architect as an 'artist' and architecture as an 'art,' then, buildings are often discussed in terms of being 'experienced' rather than 'used' – in other words, the ideal of 'architecture' is equated with the contemplation of artwork in a gallery [Hill, 2006: 51]. While I will address Benjamin's text in his terms (in reference to art) in the following, if we can substitute architecture as his subject – conceptually speaking – we can consider the resonance of his work at a scope greater than was initially intended.

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.

In Section II of his essay, Benjamin writes that there is one aspect lacking in even the most perfect reproductions: *presence*. This is a specific sense of time-and-space associable to the original work: a feeling of that work having existed in time (evidenced by its physical deterioration, changes of ownership, and so on [Benjamin, 1936: 220]), that inherently involves a spatial consideration in the requirement for 'being there' to experience it. This sense of presence is metaphysical, outside the reach of technology, and thus outside the limits of reproducibility. In other words, this presence is what allows the original maintain its 'authority' or 'stand up' to situations where it is compared to its reproductions. Conversely, Benjamin argues [1936: 220-221] that reproductions, too, have a quality that originals cannot have. Reproductions allow artworks to be placed in situations 'inaccessible' to the originals themselves – the beholder and the original work meet 'half-way,' in a space of representation. But the more this 'authority' is shifted to reproductions, the more the quality of 'presence' of the original artwork is depreciated. 'By making multiple copies,' Benjamin writes [1936: 221], 'a plurality of copies is substituted for a unique existence,' and this is the crux of his argument that the act of mechanical reproduction leads to a shattering of 'Aura' within the work.

In Section IV, Benjamin writes how works of art originated in service of *ritual* – first magical, then religious – and that this quality should never be entirely removed from thinking of its 'aura' [Benjamin, 1936: 223-224]. For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction 'emancipates' the work of art from this ritualistic basis. Using photography as a technology to advance his idea, he writes that 'to an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility' [Benjamin, 1936: 224] – where to ask for the 'original' photograph in possession of its negative makes no sense. In these cases authenticity as a criteria becomes absent from the artistic production, and the function of the art shifts away from having a ritualistic basis, which could also be regarded as shift away from its quality of 'aura.' Furthermore in Section VI, Benjamin returns to photography [1936: 225] to suggest that what its ritual 'value' gives way to is an 'exhibition value.' This doesn't occur without resistance. Citing portraiture as the early focus of photography, Benjamin notes how it still served the 'cult of remembrance,' where 'Aura [emanated] for the last time from the expression of the human face' [Benjamin,

1936: 226]. Without this human relativism (an aspect also of Rothko's work), photographs^{3.0} for Benjamin become like 'scenes of a crime,' where they serve the purpose of 'establishing evidence' but are devoid of the human or 'aura' [Benjamin, 1936: 226].

3.0. For the sake of argument I am considering photographs as analogous to reproductions as a concept. I have retained the word 'photographs' here so not to confuse Benjamin's original phrasing.

In Section XI, Benjamin makes telling use of a metaphor of healers to distinguish the idea of *distance* as an aspect of 'aura,' employing as his contrasting figures a painter (the ritualistic artist) and a cameraman (a technological, exhibitionist artist). If both were to be considered healers, Benjamin [1936: 233] associates the painter with a magician, 'healing' through the laying of hands upon the injured, maintaining a natural distance between the patient and himself and by doing so *increasing* that distance by virtue of his 'authority.' In contrast the cameraman is likened to a surgeon, where to heal is to penetrate the body and diminish the distance entirely between himself and the patient. It is to this 'distance' that Benjamin refers when he describes Aura (as quoted at the beginning of this preface) as 'the unique appearance or semblance of a distance, no matter how close the object might be' [Benjamin: Costello, 2005: 172]. Not then a *physical* distance, Benjamin's distance is something that seems impossible to grasp or derive in an absolute way. 'There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain,' Benjamin wrote of the product of the painter and the cameraman [1936: 233-234]. More importantly for Benjamin, that difference lay in the structuring of their experience.

In light of this elusiveness within Benjamin's model of Aura it becomes difficult to apply a rigid structure to its research that allows consistent findings about it, where each is equally significant to the overall project. However for clarity of reading I have split the following section into three 'themes,' each exploring an aspect of Rothko's work that I feel could have some significance to the Aura. The reader should regard *Section II* as transitional within the overall work. It is an exploratory process of researching a difficult subject that is intrinsically experimental. The nature of *which* of the concepts explored are useful for the design work, which explicitly pertain to the Aura and indeed which offer something for both is more clearly understood within *Section III*.

In this framework I have identified the 'themes' introduced at the start of each section as the throughlines for an interdisciplinary enquiry. That is, in the gathering of writers, philosophers, artists and architects within these chapters, I have acknowledged that in some instances they operate normally within very different cultural and theoretical contexts. However I have privileged the shared concern or 'theme' for that chapter as an organising principle for these groupings over one based in historio-cultural chronology or 'accuracy' in theoretical tradition. I conclude each chapter with a very brief synopsis to outline how the chapter serves the greater line of argument for the thesis as a whole, and how my theoretical method differs from such conventional ones (if applicable).

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Three | Chimera.

The thematic for this chapter is the *Chimera*, a term of indeterminate and multiple definitions. The word *Chimera* means this precisely: a ‘thing’ of indeterminate and multiple nature.^{3.1} To clarify its usage within this thesis, I suggest a version of the *Chimera* as *experiential*. Building upon the etymological basis of the term as multiple, indeterminate, ever-changing and hybrid, I ask the reader to reconfigure such qualities within the *moment of experience*. This chapter will address the constantly changing and highly ephemeral experience of art with the discussion of Rothko’s work; but also with the same ‘experiential’ Chimera as it might appear within architecture. Previous chapters have established the experience of Rothko’s art as temporal, ‘open[ing] up’ over time [Phillips, 2005 et al]. Precisely what is ‘opened up’ to has been the topic of much discourse. I suggest a part to that revealed experience is this interpretation of Chimera. To demonstrate this theory I take a reading of David Antin’s experience of the Rothko Chapel (as an integrated system of art and architecture) alongside a discussion of the dual experienced phenomena of ‘Shadow’ and ‘Cloud.’ These concepts are about a fundamental indeterminacy of experience, which will be addressed in relation to the expression of the transcendental in Rothko’s art.

Before this can occur I establish the architectural and philosophical theory underlying it. Jonathan Hill’s definitive argument for ‘immaterial’ architecture [2006] and the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s concept of poetic *measure* [Sharr, 2007] feature here. Following this is a discussion on Rothko aided by the texts by Antin [2003] and Arden Reed [1990]. To study this found experience in Rothko within architecture, this Chapter will lastly discuss Tadao Ando’s project *Azuma House* (1976), a row house built in the dense urban setting of Sumiyoshi, Osaka, Japan. Here, Jin Baek’s texts [2006a, 2006b] linking the project to eastern philosophy prove useful in articulating my interpretation of Chimera.

Immaterial architecture and *measure*.

The stability of architects’ practice is a myth, however.

–Jonathan Hill [2006: 75].

The notion of ‘im-materiality’ is closely linked with that of ‘meta-physicality.’^{3.2} Within architecture, Jonathan Hill’s book *Immaterial Architecture* [2006] argues that the qualitative *immaterial* aspects to architecture are inseparable

3.1. Etymologically [Skeat, 1910: 88], *Chimera* (or *Chimæra*), of Latin and Ancient Greek root, is ‘a fabulous monster, with a goat’s body;’ mythologically, it is interpreted as any fantastical creature with different animal parts, an ‘incongruous fancy ... or creature of the imagination;’ while architecturally, it is employed to describe merged or hybrid systems of ornamentation.

3.2. I take both to describe an aspect of resistance to matter – the prefixes ‘im-’ and ‘meta-’ can mean ‘before, after, or beyond’ – and so both the ‘immaterial’ and the ‘metaphysical’ are thus a presence that is ‘anti-’ to matter, materiality, or the physical.

3.3. The roots of this thesis lie in the same historical moment, in art. Renaissance artists proposed that one might formulate an artistic idea in the intellect, then produce an expression of that idea that was directly visual. In other words they proposed that art could make visible an otherwise unknowable idea [Hill, 2006: 40] which (as *Section I* discussed) was Mark Rothko's belief.

3.4. Instead, Heidegger favoured the poetics of experience, re-interpreting the term 'measure' as connected not with science, but rather belonging to phenomenological experience [Sharr, 2007: 79]

from its material (quantitative) aspect. For Hill, the immaterial is of equal importance. Hill traces his stance historically, writing that since the Italian Renaissance architects have seen proportion and line over 'matter,' thus asserting the intellect and the 'idea' of Architecture over the 'matter' of building. [Hill, 2006: 2, 34]

Hill's inquiry into Renaissance *painting* of the same period^{3.3} arrives at two conclusions. Firstly, that their placement within a gallery emphasised a subject-object relationship that placed *vision* at the *forefront* of the contemplative experience. Secondly, that the linear perspective of Renaissance art defined a 'fixed' observer, an 'immobile perceptual field' and a 'stable visual world' [Hill, 2006: 50-53]. ^[fig. 3.i] Rothko's work subverted these conclusions, particularly his chapel murals. Vision alone could not encompass the experience of his work. Rothko's perceptual field was entirely mobile and ever shifting, a result of not just the art but also the architecture of the chapel. This premise will be returned to in depth further in this chapter.

The second concept I employ is Martin Heidegger's poetic *measure*. Like Hill, Heidegger's applied philosophy to architecture argued for a shift away from techno-mathematical ('material') architecture [Sharr, 2007: 39].^{3.4} Heidegger considered 'measure' as immaterial rather than 'material,' comparative rather than defined. Measuring involved a 'concentrated listening,' less about forefronting a singular, determinate value than the split-second-to-split-second insights that arrive within a perceiving subject sensorily, emotionally, and instinctively [Sharr, 2007: 80]. Above all Heidegger privileged the immediacy of embodied *presence*. Echoing the writing on experiencing Rothko, architecture (or the 'making sense' of measure) is described by architect Adam Sharr [2007: 84] as 'a moment of clarity, a smoulder of enlightenment that can't so much be described as experienced ... the realization of something new or a re-comprehension of something taken for granted.' Such moments of sense-making are evident within the Chimeric experience that arises from the art-architectural integration of the Rothko Chapel, which the following will develop as a space of *measure*.

Shadow.

*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow*

*Between the conception
And the creation
Between the motion
And the response
Falls the Shadow*

—T. S. Eliot [1925: 89-90].

fig. 3.i. (top) Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Architectural View*, c. 1490-1500. A perspectival painting from the Italian Renaissance period; (bottom) Mark Rothko, *Black on Maroon*, 1959.

3.5. To phrase it as Rothko might, the Shadow falls between the unknowable, abstract idea and the experience of it in a sensory, emotional, and instinctive way.

The shadow within architecture has intertwined visual and conceptual dimensions. The visual aspect of the shadow's 'darkness' will be addressed more specifically in a Chapter Four of this text. Here, I focus on the transience of the shadow as a concept – that is, the Chimera of the shadow. In the oft-quoted phrases of poetry above, T. S. Eliot articulated the Shadow as that which falls 'in-between' ideas and reality.^{3.5} It therefore cannot be meaningfully described. Yet in my intuition of the importance of the Shadow to Rothko (and the Chapel), I will attempt to substantiate its conceptual dimension.

Arden Reed (who wrote on the signification of shadows in architecture [1990]) made an important insight into their nature as defining the position in which one is *not*. Shadows fall literally and metaphorically either side of the present, 'signifying' the obscurity of either what is yet to appear, or of what is already out of sight [Reed, 1990: 15]. Our inability to 'grasp' shadows lends them their power, as the novelist Jun'ichirō Tanizaki wrote in *In Praise of Shadows* [1933], his seminal essay on Japanese aesthetics. Tanizaki's description of the bareness of the Japanese room resonates with the descriptions of the austere bareness of Rothko's chapel paintings:

3.6. My own emphasis.

And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows – it has nothing else.^{3.6} Westerners are amazed at the simplicity of Japanese rooms, perceiving in them no more than ashen walls bereft of ornament.

[Tanizaki, 1933: 18].

Tanizaki argues that our reaction to the 'emptiness' of these spaces^[fig. 3.iii] is a failure to comprehend the infinite mystery of the Shadow in its *interaction* with 'empty' space – be it the Japanese room or the emptiness within Rothko's chapel monochromes:

by cutting off the light from this empty space [our ancestors] imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and depth superior to that of any wall painting or ornament.

[Tanizaki, 1933: 20-21].

3.7. In a visual sense, referring to a 'shadowing' of Rothko's painting.

Critics [Fer, 2008; Svedlow, 2008] have described Rothko's later work as 'shadows' of his earlier, more popular color-fields, as somber 'doubles' or even 'negatives' of those works.^[fig. 3.iii] This formal development^{3.7} is also a metaphorical one. In particular Andrew Svedlow wrote [2008: 287] of the Rothko as a kind of 'event,' where 'viewer and painter strive to meet;' where rather than having a singular meaningful experience it 'intersects and crosses paths with the changing nature of the viewer' – in other words, the work attains the conceptual dimension of the Shadow. Elementally, shadows are entirely immaterial. Their perception depends entirely on poetic measure, and indeed Reed [1990: 13] described their signification as fundamentally 'unstable' or 'slippery,' always replicating or doubling. 'As echo is to sound,' Reed wrote, 'shadow is to sight, except that the echo's temporal lag contrasts with the shadow's simultaneity. The shadow is thus as if the echo were sounded togeth-

fig. 3.ii. Katsura Imperial Villa. Reception Room (Middle Shoin). Interior, 1955. (Photograph: Arthur Drexler).

fig. 3.iii. Mark Rothko, (L-R) No. 18, 1951; No. 2, 1963; [Rothko Chapel] Center Panel, East Wall Triptych, 1967.

er with its sound, a representation coincidental with the represented.' [Reed, 1990: 15]. In escaping our capacity to conceive of them in any determinate way, shadows transform experiences from definable, objective phenomena and place them in a highly subjective territory, experientially speaking.

Cloud.

*Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleansing affection from the temporal
Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker*

—T. S. Eliot [1935: 188; 190-191].

In a literal sense, the Cloud plays an important part in the architecture of the Rothko Chapel, whose lone octagonal skylight provides the primary source of illumination for the fourteen paintings.^[fig. 3.iv] As 'architect,' Rothko had placed the works in perpetual ambiguity. Cast in the dim anti-light of shadow and entirely subservient to the natural daylight from above, they were subject to the inconceivable, immeasurable variance that the force of the Cloud could subject to that lighting at any moment. As I argued throughout *Section I*, this environmental condition shifted the affect of Rothko's art from the paintings (by themselves) to a combined experience that involved the architectural space of their siting. David Antin's account reveals the involuntary power that this combined experience could hold over visitors to the Rothko Chapel:

*then i realized that the light had changed i was there in the middle
of a sunny day ...and if a cloud passes overhead it changes what you
can see ...a single cloud passing over the central light source could
change the degree of visibility and color of the painting and this
was beginning too make me very nervous as i was trying to figure out how
i could discount the effect of the atmospheric condition of the lighting*

[Antin, 2003: 128-129].

The atmospheric effect of the Cloud provides the source of Antin's anxiety. The 'difference' that the Cloud contributes to the Rothko Chapel experience is (to recall Tanizaki [1933: 19]), 'not so much a difference in color but in shade, a difference that will seem to exist only in the mood of the viewer.'^{3.8} It was a difference that Rothko manipulated to achieve a particular affect, one the artist laboured over in his studio, gazing over his canvases for long periods to study the way it 'veiled and unveiled incident, content, and moods that appeared like so many chimeras' [Novak & O'Doherty, 2000: 268]. For Antin, the nervousness induced by the Cloud passing over the skylight triggered an anxiety that grew dramatically overwhelming. In a passage as poetic as it is *specific* to his own, deeply personal poetic measure, Antin wrote:

*but the rothko is about the failure of the human ability to stabilize the
world in relation to oneself while that self is in transition and failing
...as your eyes are fatiguing and your memory is straining
to hang on to what you hope are facts of the chapel ...the instability
it evokes in you and your sense of your human fallibility
it provides you a confrontation with a figure of your life experience
...of how you cant control your fate because a cloud could pass overhead*

fig. 3.iv. The Rothko Chapel. Interior, 1970. (Photograph: Hickey & Robertson). Original ceiling grid prior to installation of skylight diffusing panel (see fig. 2.xii)

3.8. Excerpted from a passage in Tanizaki's essay [1933: 19] where this phrase was used to described the subtle difference in the hues of Japanese walls: 'The hue may differ from room to room, but the degree of difference will be ever so slight; not so much a difference in color as in shade, a difference that will seem to exist only in the mood of the viewer. And from this delicate difference in the hue of the walls, the shadows in each room take on a tinge particularly their own.'

[Antin, 2003: 130-133].

The Chimera of the Cloud – like the Shadow – eludes our capacity to perceive it in any determinate way. The perpetual presence of the Cloud is an immaterial quality to the Chapel that introduces a *distancing* between its perceiving subjects and a full comprehension of the art. By introducing this conceptual distance, the Cloud allows the *matter* of the Rothko Chapel's constituent parts (its paintings and physical architecture) to engage with transcendental experiences.

Azuma House.

What this Chapter has been developing as Chimera plays an important part in Japanese architect Tadao Ando's *Azuma House* (1976), ^[fig. 3.v] and I am speculatively viewing it as an example of a thematic within Rothko's work translated to architecture. At its most basic, the house is a rectangular concrete box for living with the central third of that volume excavated: an empty space open to the environment. ^[fig. 3.vi] The design is materially very simple, yet *immaterially* much more complex. In the architect's own words,

I severed in half a place for daily living ...by inserting an abstract space for the play of wind and light. I sought to inject inquiry, thereby, into the inertia that has overtaken man's dwelling ... The project was, thus, an attempt at introducing discontinuity.

[Ando: Baek, 2006a: 183-184].

Jin Baek describes the literalism of Ando's architecture as having a quality that detracts from their material presence, its 'walls, windows, doors, and floors do not portend to be anything more.' Their very bareness invites no further 'deciphering.' One's attention when experiencing the house is instead diverted to the aesthetic sense of 'emptiness' that extends from the courtyard [Baek, 2006a: 183]. Ando's use of the courtyard as a central circulatory space ^[fig. 3.vii] enforces a constant encounter with the elements (wind, water, light) and the poetic measuring that extends from a presence 'within' these elements. In Ando's architecture there is a behavioural privileging of the courtyard (with its immaterial experiences) over the matter of the materially built elements by way of their arrangement within space.

Baek [2006a: 186] describes the courtyard through the eastern concept of *fudo*. As interpreted by the philosopher Tetosuro Watsuji, *fudo* loosely translates to western language as a climatic field, which affects the interiority of selfhood. With the crossing of the courtyard space, one constantly propels themselves into the experience of *fudo*^{3.9} as a counterpoint to the 'environmentally-agreeable interior' of the house. The elemental presence of the courtyard is 'felt' on the body. In this conflation of the visible and tactile there emerge moments of self-discovery through a feeling of self-negation, or the loss of one's corporeal substantiality [Baek, 2006a: 187-188].

fig. 3.v. *Azuma House*. Street Perspective, 1977. (Photograph: Japan Architect Photographics Dept.)

fig. 3.vi. *Azuma House*. Aerial Perspective, 1977. (Photograph: Japan Architect Photographics Dept.) A rooftop view over Courtyard excavation.

3.9. A climatic uncertainty I have aligned with the Chimera.

fig. 3.vii. *Azuma House*. View over Courtyard, 1977. (Photograph: *Japan Architect* Photographics Dept.)

fig. 3.viii. *Azuma House*. Interior (at Ground), 1977. (Photograph: *Japan Architect* Photographics Dept.)

Alongside *fudo*, two further eastern concepts are integral to Ando's *Azuma House* and the thematic of this Chapter. *Ma* (from Buddhist thinking) is a term with no western translation: the closest academics have come^{3.10} is to consider it the 'in-between,' the 'space,' 'place,' 'interval,' or 'void' between part and whole that is 'as much shaped by the space as it shapes the space' [Verghese, 2003: 166-168]. Arata Isozaki [2006: 95] preferred to conceive it as 'difference,' a term lesser grounded in absolute definition than the adopted translations. Much as there is no clear translation of *ma* to western linguistics, there too is no clear translation of *ma* to western architecture. However as the 'abstract space' of the courtyard represents a 'difference' within the *Azuma House*,^[fig. 3.viii] so too do the Shadow and the Cloud represent that 'difference' in the very western architecture of the Rothko Chapel. *Ma* offers the *distance* between a partial experience and a seemingly unattainable 'whole' experience that defines the Auratic experience.

3.10. Arata Isozaki notes [2006: 93] that what translations of *ma* there are depend on Western conceptions of space-time, which presumably differ from its Eastern conceptions of space-time, though Isozaki does not elaborate of the specifics of these.

Secondly there is the medieval Buddhist concept of *mujo*, which literally translates to 'no' (or 'nothing' –*mu*) 'permanence' (*jo*). *Mujo* is the fleeting impermanence of natural phenomena, an instability [Baek, 2006b: 66-67] that is at the core of my articulation of Chimera. *Mujo* operates within the *Azuma House*, whose courtyard wall 'receives, accelerates, and reflects wind: its sound, its texture, its moisture, its coldness, and its gaiety or gloom. In this reflectivity, the wall loses its substantiality.' [Baek, 2006a: 190]. As with the Rothko Chapel murals, *mujo* has a transformative affect on physical matter. In Buddhist philosophical terms, the constantly-changing *mujo* is analogous to 'moving with facility through a series of incarnations towards the goal of nirvana,' a transcendence that only arrives after annihilating the 'illusion' regarding the *permanence* of life [Baek, 2006b: 74]. 'The experience of time in ephemerality,' writes Isozaki [Baek, 2006b: 74-75], 'leaves ... no choice but to live 'from moment to moment.' This is a primacy of experience that the Chimera both defines; and is defined by.

Synopsis

In this chapter there is a shared concern for the experiential possibilities offered in a poetics of experience over the determinable – in other words, the 'immaterial' over the 'material.' I suggest that the inability to conceive of a 'whole' experience – as argued through Hill and Heidegger (and later the eastern philosophies raised by Jin Baek) – becomes a method of *distancing* that suggests a heightened sense of presence and awareness of the conditions within the moment of experience. In this regard it is argued that this heightened awareness of oneself within space aligns itself with Benjamin's 'ritual value' of the Aura.

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Figures.

- fig. 3.i. (top-bottom) Bishop, 2005: 12; Compton, 1988: 26.
- fig. 3.ii. Drexler, 1955: 161.
- fig. 3.iii. (L-R) Chave, 1989: Pl. XIV; Anfam, 2006: 18; Barnes, 1989: 71.
- fig. 3.iv. Barnes, 1989: 87.
- figs. 3.v – 3.viii. Ando, 1977a: 59; 59; 60; 61.

Four | *The dark is always at the top.*

This chapter is framed by the metaphysics of ‘darkness’ (as discussed by Anthony Vidler [1992]) which has resonance in the late work of Mark Rothko. Beginning with the Seagram Murals in 1958, Rothko darkened his palette of colour to produce works of deep, somber hues that persisted through his Harvard and Rothko Chapel commissions.^{4.1} While this darkening in palette occurred simultaneously with Rothko’s personal depression, the leap to relating the two as consequential to each other is an oversimplification [Fer, 2008: 34]. For Briony Fer [2008: 34] Rothko’s turn to a sustained period of dark output was a major shift within the artist’s *oeuvre*, as significant a formal transition as that between Rothko’s ‘multi-forms’ and his first color-fields.^{4.2} For Fer the darker works were Rothko exploring the ‘uncertainties and vagaries’ of the act of looking [Fer, 2008: 36]. The aim of this chapter is to explore Fer’s view by proposing this marked the emergence of ‘dark space’ within these later works.

I will first make a reading of Anthony Vidler’s essay, ‘Dark Space,’ to understand the spatial consequences of the phenomenology of darkness and its linkage to ‘knowledge’ as a cultural idea. From this context, I can then assess ‘darkness’ within Rothko’s work for the Chapel commission, addressing how he both instrumentalises and subverts such established knowledge – I will explore, that is, Rothko’s darkness as both an *obscuring* and a *revealing*. To analyse how the thematic of ‘darkness’ has been employed in space, I conclude with the case study of *Double Bind* (2001), a large-scale installation by Spanish sculptor Juan Muñoz in the vast Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, London. *Double Bind* is explored as a real spatial construct that engages with darkness in the manner I establish through Vidler and Rothko.

Dark space.

For Anthony Vidler, dark space is the ‘dark side’ of the space in which we exist everyday, conceptually and visually. Knowingly or not, there are cultural configurations that repeatedly impose ‘darkness’ onto ‘lightness,’ as ‘formless’ concepts that re-emerge in space as an internalising of external socio-political conditions. Vidler cites the spaces of asylum or exile encroaching upon the ‘normal’ spaces of the city as an example [Vidler, 1992: 168]. In space, this divide is best illustrated through a comparison. Historically there has been a political role *transparency* plays in space, in ‘eradicating’ myth, suspicion and the irrational by making the visible the invisible. Transparency is linked to clarity of sight and is understood as ‘knowledge,’ instrumentalising the politics of surveillance and its search for a ‘universal transparency’^{[fig. 4.i] 4.3} [Vidler, 1992:

4.1. As Chapter Two established.

4.2. This transition was raised in Chapter One in the discussion of Rothko’s stylistic progression.

fig. 4.i. Jeremy Bentham, Samuel Bentham & Willey Reveley, 1791 *Design for the Panopticon*, c. 1791.

4.3. See Vidler, 1992: 168. Specifically, the discussion of transparency here is in the context of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon prison, whereby a spatial system is employed to create a situation where the observer is placed in the position of seeing but not being seen: an all-knowing, universal transparency that defers discipline back to the prisoners themselves.

fig. 4.ii. Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Temple of Death*, c. 1790 (Bibliothèque Nationale). A subject for Vidler's discussion of 'dark space.' Boullée's Temple is sunken into the ground. In place of ornamentation on the Temple's façade, Boullée casts 'negatives' (voids) for the interplay of shadow on darkness.

4.4. In the context of Vidler's essay Caillois is discussing the Schizophrenic.

4.5. My own emphasis. Subsequent emphases are those of Caillois.

Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side^{4.5} of his senses... He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar.

[Caillois: Vidler, 1992: 174].

4.6. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, respectively.

fig. 4.iii. The Rothko Chapel. North Walls. (Photograph: Hickey & Robertson).

4.7. In the context of Breslin's text, he wrote that any self-consciously modern artist builds their career on discontinuities, constantly 'dismantling' their achievements and discarding them the moment they are accepted, or 'no longer *modern*,' citing Picasso, James Joyce and Ezra Pound as examples. By posing this theory where he does – in a Chapter on Rothko's dark paintings – Breslin suggests that this tendency was evidenced through Rothko's late, dark work.

168], a 'light' space. 'Darkness' or 'dark' space is thus posed as a negative of that transparency. It hides, represses, and *obscures* knowledge. As a 'marginal' space, it reconfigures space as 'a threat ... a harbinger of the unseen' [Vidler, 1992: 167-169].

Central to the philosophy of dark space is a dissolving or 'dematerialisation' of the body within it. Insofar as it is a physical 'void,' it is a metaphysical *presence* that acts upon one's body. Arden Reed [1990] wrote that the act of 'shadowing' means to obscure by 'wrapping' in darkness, as if the phenomenon of darkness were material. A key subject for Vidler is the architecture of Étienne-Louis Boullée, (fig. 4.ii) whose dark space 'operates as an instrument of dissolution, establishing a 'homology between subject and space.' [Vidler, 1992: 170-173]. Alongside Vidler, Claire Bishop [2005] has discussed the psychiatrist Eugene Minkowski on the lived conditions of dark space. For Minkowski, it is an 'unlimited sphere' that (in the absence of light) is a *presence*, 'more intimate ... than the clarity of visual space' [Minkowski: Bishop, 2005: 83; Vidler, 1992: 174]. Vidler also considers sociologist Roger Caillois, for whom dark space is a 'devouring force' that eventually 'replaces' the subject:^{4.4}

Darkness for Caillois is synonymous with a loss of a sense of self within space. That is in the engulfment of a complete darkness, it becomes difficult to distinguish the separation between oneself and space [Bishop, 2005: 82], the implacable 'similarity' to which Caillois refers.

There are two observations of Minkowski and Caillois that I would like to address. Firstly, that the dematerialisation of the self coincides with the occupation of an 'other side' of sensory perception. This is an idea that will re-emerge further in this Chapter. Secondly is the appearance of this phenomenon within socio-psychological theory, which differs from the cultural and architectural contexts in which it has already been discussed. This suggests the far reach of an entrenched cultural understanding of 'darkness' as an idea. Through the denial of visibility, dark space is aligned with a loss of a delimitation of the body and the obscuring of knowledge.

Obfuscating darkness.

If we can understand Rothko's work to have space, and to operate within space,^{4.6} his late work can be said to have 'dark' space. Rothko's biographer James Breslin [1993: 329] has argued that Rothko's early color-fields (with their atmospheric and perceptually infinite space) seem with his Rothko Chapel works (fig 4.iii) to be dismantled and discarded.^{4.7} In its place was an obfuscating space denying visibility, and so any 'knowledge.' Criticism of this work

reveals a consistency of exasperated frustration. Upon visiting the Chapel, David Antin [2003: 125] questioned: ‘but why should i look at these black works[?] why should i watch this process of adjustment of my eyes to this very dark set of panels[?]’ as if there were no *purpose* to the panels or knowledge to be gleaned. For Breslin [1993: 333-334] the works were ‘less eager to be liked and admired,’ instead pulling the viewer into ‘murky interior depths, a *choking darkness*’^[fig. 4.iv] more difficult and demanding of them than any of Rothko’s prior work. Stephanie Rosenthal [2007: 59] viewed the dark rectangles of the Rothko Chapel paintings as entrances into a space of ‘black nothingness;’ her eyes denied the relief it sought, her mind having nothing to grasp on to. Rosenthal wrote more broadly about the black paintings of Rothko, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and Ad Reinhardt as drawing their viewers towards the limits of visibility to induce a desperate, search for the ‘sense of the senses’ or a ‘real presence’ [Rosenthal, 2007: 73], a sense of resolution that the paintings obscured.^{4.8}

John Gage [2000: 253] wrote of Rothko’s proven ability to convey a wide range of effects with simply colour as his medium. That Rothko’s harmonious and complimentary colours were displaced by a more discordant, reductive set – in spite of this ability – lends the artistic intent behind it a heightened sense of legitimacy of authority. This begs the question; what effect was to be achieved through Rothko’s drainage of colour?

Revelatory darkness.

One reading into the effect of Rothko’s darkness is of the artist working his way *down* from a surface (the picture plane of the canvas) into ever deepening layers [Rosenthal, 2007: 58]. This search for a ‘depth’ in flatness is not dissimilar to the ‘unlimited sphere’ that Eugene Minkowski saw in the metaphorical ‘flatness’ of dark space [Vidler, 1992: 174]. The extreme darkness of Rothko’s chapel paintings demands extended concentration within their encounter. The forms of black or near-black register in one’s visual field only after a lengthened viewing. In requiring the viewer’s eyes adjust to the work, the paintings enforce a temporal as well as spatial experience. This proves a more severe *prolonging* of encounter [Fer, 2008: 37-38] that is linked to an intimacy of perception.^{4.9}

Rosenthal [2007: 56-57] argues that Rothko introduced darkness to his work to address beholders even *more* directly, to ‘intensify’ the effect of his paintings. Rothko sought for his paintings to be primary experiences rather than re-presentations. Having recognised that strong colours distracted from his intended experience, darkness served as a safeguard: an ‘acting out’ in exasperation at the ‘misrepresentation’ of his work [Breslin, 1993: 355-356]. Rothko treated darkness as a kind of truth, clarity or revelation, searching for its ‘luminosity’ [Fer, 2008: 38] in a more than literal sense.^{4.10} In this way Rothko’s darkness can be said to subvert the established understanding of darkness, which aligned transparency to truth and attributed darkness to the inverse.

fig. 4.iv. Mark Rothko, (top down) *Untitled*, 1949; *No. 1*, 1964. An early introduction of darkness to the color-field, and a much later preparatory painting for the Chapel commission.

4.8. The criticism of Antin, Breslin and Rosenthal are only a few of a much wider set of responses. For Elaine de Kooning [Weiss, 2000: 305] the paintings possess a tension, or ‘impending threat’ evident with Vidler’s discussion of dark space [1992: 168]; and David Anfam [1996: 7] also refers to an ‘increasing inwardness’ or ‘resistance to the gaze’ that becomes apparent with Rothko’s darker paintings.

4.9. The idea of the prolonged encounter and its relatedness to a closeness in encountering art was first raised in the Introduction to this text.

4.10. Briony Fer [2008: 38] discusses Rothko’s dark paintings against Ad Reinhardt’s idea that black could be a ‘medium of the mind,’ a symbol and a void, colour or non-colour. Reinhardt insisted on black as a non-colour with his abstract monochromes, whereas Rothko employed it as a ‘colour,’ searching for luminosity within it; which I here re-interpret as questioning its capacity to illuminate, or reveal.

David Antin moves past his initial perception of the 'pointlessness' of the chapel works to allow the prolonged experience to propel further internal questioning:

...why should I watch this process of adjustment of my eyes to this dark set of panels[?] the answer is that this is curious this man spent so many hours of his life working at this installation this is not a stupid man hes not an idiot and he worked for a long time dealing with this intractable range of visibility at the edge of invisibility that itself is somewhat fascinating how much of the darkness is a darkness you can see into how dark is the dark

[Antin, 2003: 125].

Rothko's dark works were no longer searching for the 'cathartic moment of release' [Fer, 2008: 41], instead they withheld the affect we would typically associate with a Rothko. This 'slowness' or deferral allowed them to open up over time, the seeming intransigence of the paintings eventually yielding 'more than they look as if they should' [Fer, 2008: 43; Novak & O'Doherty, 2000: 270]. Fer argues [2005: 171] that the almost-monochrome dark paintings continue the *redemption* of a 'picture,' rather than being 'negative anti-pictorial gestures' (as critics had labeled them). In other words they restored a conception of the picture and an aesthetic encounter in art that the Russian writer Victor Schlovsky [Chave, 1989: 183] best articulated as making experience 'unfamiliar' or 'difficult.' Scholvsky argued for increasing the 'difficulty and length' of perception within art. For Schlovsky, the very act of perceiving is 'an aesthetic end in itself and should be prolonged.'

To discover what end is served by the aesthetic encounter with Rothko's darkness, it is useful again to David Antin's first-hand account. Addressing the eyestrain invoked by the Chapel paintings, Antin compared the black works of Ad Reinhardt^[fig. 4.v] to what he saw before him:

they are equally dark [as the Reinhardts] and produce a similar eyestrain but they do not produce a feeling of exaltation what they do is produce a sense of anxiety as you begin to realize that what youre seeing after a long interval of intense looking has modified your ability to see ...so youre not sure whether what youre seeing now youre seeing with the same visual capacity you had earlier

[Antin, 2003: 129-130].

Antin's 'revelation' in this case is slowly deferred over a period of modified looking. For Antin there is a 'selective exhaustion of dark registering nerves of the retina' [2003: 129-130] within the darkness of the paintings that (over time) confronts its viewer with the border of knowing and unknowing. Rather than simply seeing in darkness a denial or an 'antipictorial gesture' within art, Rothko employed its metaphysical qualities to open up an experience that looked 'further' than the point of seeing. This experience relies less on the comprehensive knowledge of an objective view. Rather it is an experience in which what is 'seen' is called into question. As opposed to being absolute, the work demands an engagement with the 'other side' of one's sensory capacity.

fig. 4.v. (L-R) Ad Reinhardt, *No. 24*, 1959; Mark Rothko, *Untitled (South Wall Painting)*, 1964-1967.

fig. 4.vi. The Turbine Hall, at Bankside Power Station (prior to conversion to Tate Modern), London.

4.11 As was the case before (and has often been since) for the Tate Modern's annual commission for an artist to work in the space.

fig. 4.vii. Juan Muñoz, *Double Bind*. Bridge level perspective. (Photograph: Rod Tidman).

4.12. This search for the reinvestment of the singular or 'authentic' encounter within space is a repeated subject in Muñoz's work, exploring privacy and subjectivity in connection with the art, to encourage a sense of 'isolation' within the viewer. See May, 2001: 62.

Double Bind.

These qualities to the experience of Rothko's Chapel works are evident in the last and culminating work of the late sculptor Juan Muñoz called *Double Bind*. *Double Bind* was a 2001 installation at the Tate Modern in London, where Muñoz was tasked with working in the monumental scale of its Turbine Hall. [fig. 4.vi] Muñoz did not respond with a similarly monumental sculptural work;^{4.11} instead he devised an architectonic *mise-en-scene* that addressed the verticality of the space. The installation consisted of a false floor bisecting the Hall at the bridge level, producing three distinct spaces. Firstly a light space above the false floor with a pattern of penetrations in its ground plane. [fig. 4.vii] Secondly a dark space below the false floor where those penetrations become light wells in its ceiling plane. Thirdly an interstitial space of unknown quality sandwiched between the two false planes [May, 2001]. [fig. 4.viii] Its complexity of experience belies this seemingly simple architectural intervention. By employing the pairing of light and dark spaces, *Double Bind* manipulates its visitors' visual perception and expectations for an objective view. Like the experience of a dark Rothko, *Double Bind* places its viewers in a constant state of 'in-between.' In *Double Bind* one cannot see all, and all that one sees cannot possibly be all that it seems.

Muñoz's intention was to challenge the occupants of space that 'just drift without caring,' forcing them to re-assert their attention [Hannah, 2004: 55]. Here that meant a work in which '[visitors] can pay attention as if they were the only one there' [Muñoz: Lingwood, 2001: 72]. In other words, his desire was to restore a quality of primacy to experience. In this, Muñoz aligned himself with the redemption of the pictorial experience within the darkness of a late Rothko, though here that experience was rendered architectural.^{4.12} Muñoz's provocation with *Double Bind* was perhaps then a greater one: that the modern occupant of space is so *distracted* that the re-insistence on 'unknowing' is necessary to invoke attention once more. At another level it is again Clement Greenberg's *reductio ad absurdum* [1955], where to reduce one mode of visual perception is to contradictorily achieve the opposite effect (one of a renewed attention). *Double Bind* placed its visitors in the heightened tension of a state of unknowing, as did Rothko with his dark Chapel works.

Muñoz's subterranean dark space has been compared to an underground car-park. [fig. 4.ix] Susan May writes of the cultural medium of cinema that teaches us of the 'shorthand' of such spaces – shadows, disembodied footsteps and impending threat [May, 2001: 63-64]. Yet despite this foreboding environment, one's physical immersion in the darkness is the key to understanding the work. Similar to Rothko's darkness, the prolonged encounter enforced within the dark spatial experience at first obscures, then re-appears as a revelatory. The initial experience of the subterranean space is of a 'tenebrous darkness, imbued with foreboding and ambiguity.' Eventually, this anxiety settles into an intensified sensory perception for the viewer as he or she comes to understand the work. Only by immersing oneself in the dark space and adjusting

fig. 4.viii. Juan Muñoz, *Double Bind*. Section sketch. (Photograph: Rod Tidman).

fig. 4.ix. Juan Muñoz, *Double Bind*. View from subterranean dark space. (Photograph: Rod Tidman).

fig. 4.x. Juan Muñoz, *Double Bind*. Interstitial space. (Photograph: Rod Tidman).
A view of the 'light' in-between space of the thickened false floor seen only from the darkness below ground.

to its demands is there the realisation that not all of the penetrations above are replicated below as light wells. Several open up into the interstitial, thickened false floor which hides a literally unknown space.^[fig. 4.x] This ‘in-between’ contains traces of inhabitation (vents, shuttered windows, and sometimes a series of disquieting, grey sculpted figures) that suggest a sense of surveillance [May, 2001: 64]. The result is an immersion in the act of seeing, a revised attentiveness that fulfills Muñoz’s stated aim. *Double Bind* provides an inversion of the cultural understanding of light and dark space put forth by Vidler, where light and transparency is equated with exposure to knowledge [1992]. To ‘know’ or ‘understand’ in *Double Bind* means to follow the cultural norm of drawing oneself towards the lightest space, only Muñoz inserts a space there where one is viewed instead of viewing. The ‘light’ space poses the threat, while the dark space eventually attains some level of comfort for the visitor.

The concept of the duet is critical to the function of Muñoz’s *Double Bind*, just as the formless ‘lightness’ and ‘darkness’ that began this chapter could not exist in isolation. Dorita Hannah [2004: 57] wrote of the work rendering the spectator ‘both participant and stranger,’ by establishing a literal and psychological *distance* from *knowing*. In this regard it echoes Benjamin’s writing of Aura, particularly his analogy of the healer and the magician.^{4.13} James Lingwood [2001: 71] wrote of the tension between creating an image and building a sculpture, describing the experiential arrangement of the work as dual: ‘the space you can look at and the one you feel your way through; between image and experience, or between scenography and sculpture.’ This duet provides an engagement with Vidler’s writing of light and dark space at an architectural level, at points engaging with and subverting the socio-cultural expectations of what light and dark spaces should constitute. Similarly it provides the either/or scenario in Rothko’s artistic project. If he felt his luminous earlier works were being ‘misrepresented’ [Breslin, 1993: 355-356] as the *image*, or ‘space you can look at’ – then his turn to darkness was in search of the longer, more complex *experience*, ‘the one you feel your way through.’

4.13. Refer to the preface to this Section for my account of this analogy, where the magician attains ‘authority’ analogous to aura by maintaining a metaphorical ‘distance’ between himself and his patient.

Synopsis

In my reading of darkness within this chapter I identify its relatedness to knowledge, and by extension objectivity. In the cultural reading of Vidler, dark space is established as that which represses knowing, reconfiguring space as a threat. I have argued through an analysis of both Rothko and Juan Muñoz’s work that this conventional understanding can be *reversed*, that darkness can in a sense be revelatory. A different sense of objectivity is offered within ‘dark spatial’ experiences, where the reduction of the sense of vision heightens the others in an extension of an aesthetic encounter that resists reproducibility.

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Figures.

- fig. 4.i. *Bentham Papers*, cxv. 44;
- fig. 4.ii. Vidler, 1992: 166.
- fig. 4.iii. Borchardt-Hume, 2008: 24.
- fig. 4.iv. Anfam, 1996: (top down) 17; 21.
- fig. 4.v. (L-R) Rosenthal, 2007: 143; Barnes, 1989: 70.
- fig. 4.vi. Ursprung (ed.), 2005: 144.
- figs. 4.vii – 4.x. *Juan Muñoz: Double Bind at Tate Modern*: 79; 42-43; 98-99; 102-103.

Five | *Silence is so accurate.*

To associate a thematic to this chapter in a word, I would suggest ‘Authority.’ Rothko’s turn to a darker palette^{5.1} resulted in an increased austerity in the formal parameters of his painting; the artist’s response to losing faith in the possibility of an ‘idealised’ viewer [Anfam, 1996: 8-9]. This Chapter explores the authority or ‘command’ Rothko felt an ‘image’ could cast over its viewer as a result of that skepticism, but firstly I will establish it in the greater context of this thesis through noting two significant differences from its preceding chapters, the first being is the works of art I take as subject. Chapters Two, Three, and Four have logically arrived at the Rothko Chapel as a climactic site [Novak & O’Doherty, 2000: 273] or a ‘model’ for the transcendental spatial system Rothko strived for, and a specific aesthetic encounter he strived for his beholders to experience. In a sense, this chapter aims to ‘reverse-engineer’ this complex affect by thinking *backwards* to the Seagram commission, its ‘origin,’ in light of what has been argued thus far. By modulating the encounter with his art through ensemble commissions (of which the Seagram marked the first),^{5.2} Rothko learnt to articulate a type of authority over the space of their siting. This was an animation ‘not [of] the space behind’ the art but rather ‘the space in front... the space of the spectator’s encounter.’ [Fer, 2008: 34].

The second difference is in the architectural ‘case study.’ Chapters Three and Four followed a similarly strict structure, discussing the Rothko Chapel through specific thematic ‘lenses,’ before identifying spatial ‘demonstrations’ of that theory that occurred *after* the discussion of the art. In dissolving that structure, this chapter takes for its ‘case’ an architectural space that Rothko considered a ‘sub-conscious influence’ [Weiss, 2000: 318-319; Jones, 2002]^{5.3} to his Seagram mural series: the *ricetto* (vestibule) of Michelangelo’s *Biblioteca Laurenziana* (Laurentian Library) in San Lorenzo, Florence. The difference is in the artwork’s ‘proximity’^{5.4} to the studied space. The *ricetto* comes literally and theoretically *before* the art, and so spatial thinking influenced the production of the art very closely. This in turn affects the framing of this Chapter, where my discussion of Michelangelo’s *ricetto* at the forefront allows it to feed organically through the remaining body of the chapter and underscore the architectural integrality to Rothko’s Seagram project. Kitaro Nishida’s philosophy of visibility [Bryson, 1986] is then addressed in relation to Rothko’s murals particularly for its questioning of the subject as an assumed center of the visual field. Lastly, I bring together these discussions of the architecture and the art by drawing similarities between the effect of both works. In their conscious design of discordant elements, I discuss the psychological effect of

5.1. As raised in Chapter Two and discussed to a greater extent through Chapter Four.

5.2. Refer to Chapter Two of this thesis for further on Rothko’s ensembles. There I have elaborated on these ideas in discussion of the Seagram murals.

5.3 Jones quotes Rothko here describing the influence of what he called the ‘sombre vault’, in reference to Michelangelo’s *ricetto*: ‘After I had been at work for some time, I realized that I was much influenced subconsciously by Michelangelo’s walls in the staircase of the Medicean Library in Florence.’

5.4. To clarify, here I mean a conceptual or relational ‘proximity’ as opposed to a physical/geographical one.

fig. 5.i. *Biblioteca Laurenziana*. Aerial View, c. 1934. In the picture, the Library is the long facade in the lower left, while the *ricetto* abuts the Library at its right.

fig. 5.ii. Michelangelo, Entrance door to the Library, Vestibule Side. Sketches and Scale Drawing (Casa Buonarrotti 98). c. 1523-1525. Note Michelangelo's particularity for detail and proportion.

5.5. A method of mechanical reproduction of space that this thesis is conscious of moving forward into its designed application in *Section III*.

5.6. Jonathan Jones here states explicitly: '...there is no question. Rothko's paintings are translations of Michelangelo's blocked-off windows.'

5.7. Rothko has often been quoted for expressing his 'malicious intent' with accepting the Seagram commission. Rothko was scornful of the upper class. See Compton [1988] for instance.

both works at placing the viewer 'at the precipice' of a conflicting (as opposed to anchored) experience, and how the manipulation of the abstract dimensions of *scale* and *proportion* lends itself to resonating in the unconscious.

Ricetto, Biblioteca Laurenziana.

The *Biblioteca Laurenziana* or Laurentian Library, designed by the Italian Renaissance architect, sculptor and painter Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, sits as part of a cloister of buildings attached to the Medicean Church of San Lorenzo in Florence.^[fig. 5.i] Its *ricetto* (or vestibule, which allows visitors to ascend from the cloister into the Reading Room of the Library), is one of Michelangelo's most well-regarded works of architecture [Jones, 2002]. The claustrophobic nature of this ante-room stems from its intense proportioning:^[figs. 5.ii & 5.iii] several times higher than it is wide or deep, what slight floor area there is in the space is mostly occupied by a sprawling, ornate, triple-flighted staircase that spills in, allowing users to ascend to the light space of the Reading Room. Pushed back by the intimidating mass of the stair, the walls (with their famously bricked-in false windows and doors) create a sense or feeling of oppression that one becomes conscious of even in simply looking at photographs [Jones, 2002; Jackson, 1968].^[fig. 5.iv]

Cited by historians as an early example of expressionist or 'Mannerist' architecture [Jones, 2002; Wittkower, 1934: 214-215], Michelangelo's *ricetto* was deliberately designed 'not for function or even spectacular effect, but to alter your sense of space' [Jones, 2002]. Robert Jackson, whose writing of the phenomenological readings of photographs of the space^{5.5} [1968] will be returned to later in this chapter, described how one might be momentarily 'struck physically motionless' by the 'emotional tumult' of the space, quoting Roy Daniells as having said, 'Michelangelo ... being dead yet speaketh.' [Jackson, 1968: 56]. For Jackson and Daniells, Michelangelo instilled in the *ricetto* an 'Aura' that Rothko absorbed and sought to translate into not just his murals, but their effect on the spatial system of his Seagram dining room [Jones, 2002].^{5.6} Rothko described the *ricetto* as 'the somber vault,' emphasizing the success of Michelangelo's architecture at achieving 'just the kind of feeling' he was after:

[Michelangelo] makes the viewers feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up, so that all they can do is butt their heads for ever against the wall.

[Rothko: Jones, 2002]

Rothko's antagonism underlying the Seagram commission has been well-covered by many writers [Breslin, 1993; Compton, 1988; Jones, 2002 et al],^{5.7} but even more basically, Rothko was simply interested in the idea of enclosure or containment, a 'wholeness' to an environment that would best serve his art. In an untitled note on the Seagram series, Rothko wrote that 'what was obvious [was] that there was in me the need to undertake a conception of a place contained and absolutely mine... if I should be given an enclosed space which

fig. 5.iii. *Biblioteca Laurenziana*. Library and vestibule. Section. (Gëymuller).

fig. 5.iv. *Biblioteca Laurenziana*. Ricetto. (Photograph: Alinari).

fig. 5.v. Sketch for [Seagram Mural] 'No. 6'. Mark Rothko, *Black on Maroon*, 1958.

5.8. Achim Borchardt-Hume quotes the German art critic Werner Haftmann here on the Seagram murals: 'soon we were encompassed by these darkening walls of light. It was a very spiritual luminosity ... It was not a real light and did not suggest any perspective. It had no source.'

5.9. Bryson referred to the example of Sartre's park watcher to demonstrate his premise: in it, a singular subject viewing the park space – as an unchallenged center of a visual field – is *disrupted* through the intrusive entrance of another into that field of vision. For Sartre, the lines of vision that at first converged on the subject-as-center in the first instance *reconverge* at the point of that intruder, placing the first subject as periphery, and reconfiguring the intruder (where the watcher self is *not*) as the new center of the visual field [Bryson, 1986: 89].

fig. 5.vi. Seagram Murals as installed at Tate Gallery, Millbank. May 1970. (Photograph: Tate Gallery Archive).

I could surround with my work it would be the realization of a dream that I have always held' [Rothko, 1960]. It was this long-held dream that instigated the architectural thinking underlying Rothko's art.

The expanded field.

With this 'place contained,' Rothko's Seagram murals – with their portals or windows into abstract spaces of denial^[fig. 5.v] and the artist's long-held resistance to illusionistic perspective – can be argued to have 'de-centred' the viewer. In other words, Rothko aimed to place his beholder (as subject) within a visual field for which the they were *not* center. At their extreme reduction, Rothko's Seagram pictures resisted revealing any kind of 'center' to the visual 'field' they created together [Haftmann: Borchardt-Hume, 2008: 19].^{5.8} But they nonetheless remained undeniable presences in the room, where to turn one's back to a canvas would engage a feeling of being acted upon or 'watched' by the others in the ensemble. In this regard Rothko's work aligns itself with the art historian Norman Bryson's [1986: 87] critique of the prevailing thinking of vision, where the subject was positioned as universally centred in the world. In *The Gaze in the Expanded Field* [1986], Bryson proposed an expansion of that thinking by referencing the Eastern displacement (de-centering) of the subject in the field of vision through the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida.^{5.9}

Bryson's reference to Kitaro Nishida is in Nishida's challenging of the anthropocentric subject, who sees from a stable location, singularly placed and independently existing [Bryson, 1986: 96]. Nishida's philosophy is dependent on thinking in negative terms. Describing the existence of a flower from seed to dust, each moment of that flower's existence is for Nishida only a *phase* in its incremental transformations between those extremities (seed and dust). What appears as a 'flower' is only the difference two such phases: one closer to an existence as 'seed', the next closer to an existence as 'dust.' The flower is merely the difference between the object and its surrounding field of impermanence [Bryson, 1986 : 88-89]. In this case the existence of the flower demands consideration from moment to moment (that is, in terms not unlike the poetic *measuring* described in Chapter Three). Likewise, in visual terms, the viewing of Rothko's work is in relation the surrounding work (a 'field') in which the meaningful experience is only understood in the difference between the 'part' of the ensemble immediately before one's visual field (a *phase* in Nishida's existential thinking) and the 'whole' of the ensemble. As Rothko described in his note on the Seagram series:

The final image had to be free of interior connotations. The problem was to image an image which was whole and extraneous to the several images themselves. In short to make a place rather than pictorial vestiges.

[Rothko, 1960]

Rothko had established, with the 'place contained' [1960] by his murals a space in which (as Bryson describes [1986: 101]), 'what can be seen is supported and interpenetrated by what is outside of sight.'^[fig. 5.vi] Bryson ques-

tioned how this metaphysical aspect of ‘what is outside of sight’ could be conveyed or represented together with what is seen:

for surely we now stand at the very limits of representation. From this point on, only a technique which undermines the frame can stand in for the invisible which the frame excludes... it must be in terms of the nonrepresentational or the anti-representational.

At these limits of representation, I argue that the art becomes metaphysically spatial, where the space of architecture is employed as a ‘technique which undermines the frame.’ The spatiality contained within Rothko’s Seagram murals was not a literal, physical one (though that inevitably became involved with it), but a more metaphysical feeling of space or being-in-space that the art induced. This leaves the question of ‘*how?*’ which I will address the following, through a discussion that both re-iterates Michelangelo’s *ricetto* and Rothko’s Seagram murals.

At the precipice.

I think of my pictures as dramas: the shapes in the pictures are the performers ... neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance. They begin an unknown adventure in an unknown space ... ideas and plans that existed in the mind at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur.

—Mark Rothko [1947-1948: 140]

In 1968, Robert Jackson challenged another presupposition in the modern mentality of vision. Writing of the ‘Alinari’ photograph of Michelangelo’s *ricetto*,^{5,10} Jackson argued that ‘I am not required to understand myself fixed in an eternally separated “other world” from that library,’ stressing further that ‘images in a living mind are *active*’^{5,11} [Jackson, 1968: 54-56]. For Jackson, architecture has a special character that distinguishes it as an art – the complete physical participation it requires. He wrote that ‘the man who would properly experience a building does not merely look at it; he enters it’ [Jackson, 1968: 56]. The physical movement of a subject perceiving architecture is preceded by a prior psychic movement; where given the stimulus of a façade, the subject generates possibilities for interpenetration with that façade *before* his physical confrontation with it [Jackson, 1968: 56]. In considering the idea of Rothko’s works as façades – a comparison made by his critics^(fig. 5.vii) – we can begin to view them in a more strictly architectural light.

This psychic movement or interpenetration within a planar surface is (in both the *ricetto* and Rothko’s Seagram murals) to a confrontation with a constant, irresolute conflict. The architectural historian Rudolf Wittkower, who provided the first significant account of the architecture of Michelangelo’s *ricetto* [1934], wrote of it being poised in this conflicting state:

every attempt to follow out the clues provided by the architecture in one sense immediately makes the opposite sense good ... This kind of architecture gives the eye a very special stimulus to movement ... the eye wanders

5.10. This is the photograph shown earlier in the chapter as fig. 5.iv (see pg. 59).

5.11. My own emphasis.

fig. 5.vii. Biblioteca Laurenziana, *Ricetto*. Interior ‘facade’. See fig. 5.v (facing page) for comparison.

ceaselessly here, there, and everywhere ... let us term it unstable.

[Wittkower, 1934: 208]

Where earlier I argued that Rothko's aim was to transfer the 'aura' of the *ricetto* into his Seagram Murals, it was in reference to this characteristic of conflict or instability. As Jackson echoed [1968: 54] following Wittkower, 'the controlling theme of the whole building is, indeed, an unresolved alternation between extremes,' which as Wittkower stressed, 'gives the eye a very special stimulus to movement.' Rothko's ambition was to contradictorily *concretise* this *movement*, or perhaps more simply, to 'artefact' within his canvases a physical/psychological state *contrary to stasis*.

Wittkower argues [1934: 214-215] that this instability is important in identifying 'Mannerist' architecture as differentiated from the era spanning Renaissance to Classicism, which knew 'no conflict inherent' in its architecture. In contrast to Renaissance architecture, the *ricetto* for Wittkower contained an 'inner suspense' that was the essence of the dynamic Baroque, which followed. In this way the Mannerist *ricetto* could be considered 'proto-Baroque,' for which Wittkower offers a set of characteristics:

Where masses interpenetrate one another, where there is ceaseless movement, where vital strengths constantly clash – there are naturally suspense and conflict... one is perpetually faced with the unanswerable question: is this to be regarded thus or thus.

[Wittkower, 1934: 214-215]

Rothko's Seagram murals have been described in similar terms. Their openings should be penetrable. They 'ought to allow the mind to egress' [Jones, 2002], but they deny it. Simultaneously they offer motifs of portal, door, window, and space only to deny it through those very openings, in an optical and psychological return to the two-dimensional canvas.^{5,12} Writing in 2002 on an exhibition at the Tate Modern in London, Jonathan Jones deemed the Seagram Murals as the most challenging there exhibited, precisely for their natural suspense or conflict, 'because they demand your time, emotion, thought and commitment, only to throw these things back in your face, confronting the mind with a wall, a terminal chamber.' [Jones, 2002].

Authority.

[Rothko's] craving to 'control the situation' had grown more insistent, while 'the situation' had become less and less clear.

–Dore Ashton [Borchardt-Hume, 2008: 28]

If the challenging nature of Rothko's Seagram work is to be accepted, there is a validity in the argument that Rothko's Seagram project pushed experience further; past the point of a cartesian understanding offered by vision and into Bryson's 'nonrepresentational or antirepresentational' [1986: 101]. This lack of easily being able to 'see' allowed Rothko to 'command' a *place* in the way he

5.12. Robert Jackson [1968:58] similarly describes his phenomenological reading of the *ricetto* photograph through a return to its two-dimensionality as fact, and the acknowledgement of the many complex relations with space possible through vision: 'But rest, my psyche; each time and place has its own fulfilment. Like the reader of this article, I have no more before my eyes than a two-dimensional print of a photograph, a mere layer of ink on one side of a thin piece of paper. This is but the anteroom to the anteroom, the aspect of an aspect. It is not all there is, but it contains the key to the whole, and has a certain special value of its own in addition. The photograph alone moves the seeing man, moves him wholly, psyche and soma, body and soul.'

held was his dream [1960]. Rothko's ocular-centric beholders were not able to have a full cognizance of his art, both visually and as a consequence of his arrangement of the works within space. Where this occurred it was a conscious design; so that the art might resonate in their *unconscious* [Chave, 1989: 189]. Having reached his *reductio ad absurdum* in technique (and having almost eliminated *colour* from his method with his darker paintings), Rothko was left with only 'scale' and 'proportion' to design his emotional 'measures.'⁷ [fig. 5.viii] Rudolph Wittkower wrote of these abstract dimensions as ways of unlocking the unconscious: of giving conscious or intellectual direction to subconscious impulses [Wittkower, 1953: 109]. As supported by the history of modern psychology [Wittkower, 1953], the yearning for basic order, harmony and proportion is deeply embedded in human nature. It is unsurprising then that by the advent of the Seagram Murals Rothko had arrived at the modulation of these two means as a way to disrupt; to convey emotional dissonances and thereby to assert authority over his beholders in a way he first appreciated within the space of Michelangelo's *ricetto*.

Rothko's ambivalence toward the critical response to his work is well stated. The experience of his art was intended to defy description, and this was best (and most simply) expressed in his own words: '*silence is so accurate.*' As Anna Chave elaborated,

[Rothko] ventured in his paintings to describe and so validate what pre-existing languages, whether verbal or visual, denied or disallowed. He tried to say what language cannot. That so many people describe being touched and somehow rendered speechless by Rothko's art may point, however contradictorily, to its very muteness as a source of its eloquence.

[Chave, 1989: 174].

For Rothko, the beholder moved to silence was an indicator that his art had achieved its aim; that it had asserted the Authority he wished to hold over a place. It was by refusing coherent visual syntaxes (conventional understandings of vision) that Rothko was able to realise this.

Synopsis

In this chapter I return to the question of the spatial command of Rothko's art in explicit reference to the 'origin' of this thinking within his work, the Seagram murals. I locate as elements to this command a relatedness to vision and visibility. Reading Nishida through Norman Bryson's text, this is interpreted as a 'de-centring' resistant to conventional modes of representation. From this I return to the subjects of the Seagram Murals and Michelangelo's architecture in assessment of how such conventional visual syntaxes are destabilised. In Rothko, this was a direct appeal to the unconscious through the dimensions of scale and proportion, Rothko's way of creating a *place*. I have argued Nishida's model of thinking to be aligned with such a place created by the Seagram commission, where meaning is only understood through 'difference.'

fig. 5.viii. Mark Rothko, (Top down) *Untitled* (estate no. H23.8); *Untitled* (estate no. H23.3); *Untitled* (estate no. H23.2); all 1961. Pencil, ink sketches on paper.

These rarely seen sketches demonstrate how Rothko might have designed the emotional 'measures' of his art through the abstract dimensions of just scale and proportion. In their free formal presentation they can be compared with Surrealist automatic drawing, which as Chapter One of this text noted was a technique aimed at drawing 'undiluted' by conscious thought: it was drawing from the *unconscious*.

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Figures.

- figs. 5.i – 5.iii. Wittkower, 1934: 10, 46, 13.
- fig. 5.iv. Jackson, 1968: 55.
- fig. 5.v. Compton, 1988: 22.
- figs. 5.vi & 5.vii. Borchardt-Hume, 2008: 142 & 17.
- fig. 5.viii. Weiss, 2000: (Top down) 191; 192; 193.

Six | The reproduction of space.

In closing this section, and marking the shift from thematic ‘extraction’ to its ‘application’ (my own design work), I aim with Chapter Six to return to the Benjaminian ideas that began it, but with a more detailed and specific engagement that deals explicitly with architecture and space. Here I am able to begin to bring together what both Mark Rothko and Walter Benjamin offer that is useful to architectural thinking (which *Section III* will expand upon). Firstly, I return to the idea of presence referenced as a key aspect of Aura in the preface to this section; before looking again at reproduction through reference to Beatriz Colomina, whose theory on *architectural* reproduction expands upon Benjamin’s original work. Lastly, I briefly address those that challenge or question Benjamin’s ideas through particular reference to the Appropriation artist Sherrie Levine. This acts as a lead-in to a series of my own design experiments that begin to address the thematic issues brought about through *Section II*, establishing some critical insights that serve the project discussed in *Section III*.

Presence.

The work of art is an ordered world of its own kind in which we are aware, at every point, of its becoming.

–Meyer Schapiro [1957: 216].

In very different ways, a conceptual similarity can be drawn between Chapters Three, Four and Five in that they each forefront the idea of presence. In other words, the separate discussions of Chimera, Darkness and Authority each arrive at the point where – through Rothko’s work and the architectural cases I have associated with that work – one is confronted with situations where they are aware, at every point, of a sense of becoming [Schapiro, 1957: 216]. This specific experience is related to an immediacy that can only be had by a physical, bodily presence within space and which (as posed at the beginning of this section) Benjamin linked with both the Aura, and thus the original. Beyond any particular ideology within the *content* of Rothko’s art is this idea of immediacy or directness.

Gernot Böhme writes [2005: 402-403] that the ‘decisive experience’ (in other words, the ‘auratic’ experience) takes place in *architecture* only in a participation in the space it creates through our presence within it. For Böhme, the recognition of the space of physical presence is a recognition of the actual ‘subject matter’ of the ‘art’ of architecture [Böhme, 2005: 406]. In short, architecture

conveyed through reproduction (photographs, drawing convention, or otherwise) – that is, architecture *without* its physical presence – is for Böhme essentially 'not' architecture. It is, I suspect, 'of' architecture and space, but *is not inherently* architecture or space. Returning to Benjamin's idea that where the beholder and the original meet halfway (through reproduction) presence and so Aura is diminished [Benjamin, 1936: 220-221], it follows that the return of 'presence' to architecture invokes a return of its 'Aura.'

As Briony Fer writes [2005: 168], Rothko reinforced his idea of encounter through repetition, which for him was a method for 'preserving the picture in a state of expansion and affect.' Rothko was a proponent for an 'expanded sense of the picture' [Fer, 2005: 168] that was underwritten in thinking about presence within space. Fer notes how the Seagram murals (a group of which since 2000 have been exhibited together in the 'Rothko Room' of the Tate Modern) provide a moment of sustained, prolonged attention that serves as a respite from the 'quickfire juxtapositions' of the rest of the museum [Fer, 2005: 168]. To use Benjamin's terms, the 'theatrical space of absorption' [Fer, 2005: 168] provided by the Seagram murals (in a close approximation of Rothko's original intent, spatially) provide an art invested in 'ritual value' over the 'exhibition' value of the majority of the works. The experience of the Tate's Rothko Room, Fer writes [2005: 168-169],

is a kind of dissolving, where the unitary gaze is made over into a multiplicity of perspectives, where the contemplative gaze is transformed into pure bodily affect, where the viewer's absorption in the scene is one of constantly shifting sensation that dissolves in repetition.

Fer describes an experience which cannot be offered through reproductions of space: the 'multiplicity of perspectives,' the 'constantly shifting sensation,' the 'pure bodily affect,' and so on. The 'ritual value' Benjamin aligns with original artistic Aura becomes critically linked with a spatial prerequisite and one's presence within it.

Primitivus and Reproduction.

Writing on the 'primitive', Dalibor Vesely traced its etymology to the latin root *primitivus*: 'the first' or 'the first of its kind' [Vesely, 2006: 17]. The words 'primordium' and 'primordial', meaning an 'origin' or 'beginning,' derive from the same root and Vesely notes how these words have been culturally integrated in service of an idea of 'foundation' or 'ground' of understanding: a reference point, an original. If we consider the *primacy* of experience as related to immediacy in Rothko and Benjamin's sense, the links between authenticity and presence become clearer. As Beatriz Colomina noted, the dictionary definition of reproduction – to 'produce a copy or representation of; cause to be seen, heard again' [1989: 8] – suggests the prior existence of a legitimate, authentic act that diminishes the importance of any reproduction.

Typically, architecture is experienced first as a representation (a *reproduction* of space – that is, a device which transmits it by means other than itself [Colomina, 1989: 7]) before it is experienced as a building [Hill, 2006: 38]. Because space is contemplated firstly as image, the practice of architecture is thus an interpretative act, with a linguistic condition that differs from the practical condition of building [Hill, 2006: 38; Colomina, 1989: 7]. Jonathan Hill [2006: 38] traces the explicit divide (in architecture) between the *production* of building and the *reproduction* of building (through the *production* of images and words) to the historical point where the architect's training was shifted to the university, as opposed to the previously-held model for architectural training through apprenticeship. From that moment onwards, Hill argues that the 'artistic, intellectual and academic status' of architects became defined by their 'command of the visual field,' [Hill, 2006: 38] in opposition, I suggest, to the more abstract haptic or emotive fields Rothko's art worked within. Prior to the advent of technologies for mechanical reproduction discussed by Benjamin – photography and lithography particularly – the only audience for architecture was the direct user of that space [Colomina, 1989: 9]. Since their inception and the *reproduced* space of imagery in magazines or through tourism, architecture has gained reception increasingly through social consumption, an 'amplification' of the audience that significantly changes the relation between user and object [Colomina, 1989: 9; Benjamin, 1936].

I wrote previously of the interpretative/linguistic aspect of architecture, and considering the reproduction of space as a *translation* allows a return to that contention. Reproduction, as a mode of translation, allows the conveyance of architecture to a wider and greater audience, even if that audience is not the intended audience of the original (being the direct users of that space). Walter Benjamin wrote of translation prior to his *Work of Art...* essay in a text called *The Task of the Translator* [1923], and there he proposed ideas that would develop in his discussion on mechanical reproduction. Benjamin argued that no matter how good, translations could have no significance without the original because without the existence of the original for the reader's sake, the translation would have no basis for understanding [Benjamin, 1923: 70-71].

This is an idea that reaches as far back as Plato, who proposed that perception was based on eternal, enduring and immaterial 'Forms' (ideas) that the intellect could comprehend, but which were subject to change and decay through a translation into the material world (their reproduction). For Plato, technology was a mechanism for 'seduction' of a belief in distorted ideas [Hill, 2006: 39]. Rothko's art reached for transcendental ideas that could be aligned with Platonic 'Forms.' As an artist, he knew that each mode of translation through which his art underwent would detrimentally affect their ability to communicate. Hence Rothko would go to such obsessive extremes to eliminate all 'cultural mediation' of his work and ensure it was confronted as immediate [Breslin, 1993: 332].

The problem of reproduction lies in striving for this immediacy. Writing on Benjamin, Diarmuid Costello distilled the social basis of the aura's decay in words of Benjamin's own:

the desire of the present-day masses to 'get closer' to things spatially and humanly, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction.

[Benjamin: Costello, 2005: 174]

I will give an architectural example to clarify this. Here, Benjamin is pointing out the social need to 'get closer' to spaces (things) that are too remote (physically) to be experienced – a famous piece of architecture, perhaps, in a far-off country. To achieve the sense of immediate knowledge of that space, we consume it through *reproduction*: through the photography of others who have visited the site, or through architectural plans, sections or elevations that can be decoded into information about that space. Technological advancement has allowed these reproductions to become more and more instantly accessible. But the 'immediacy' offered by this, in the one sense, is substituted for the other sense of immediacy: that of embodied presence. This 'stripping of the veil from the object' [Benjamin: Costello, 2005: 174] offered by the reproduction of space is synonymous with the withering of the Aura, where the spatial *primitivus* – its sense of spatio-temporal individuality – is on the one hand 'forfeited,' for a 'documentary authenticity' on the other [Habermas, 1972: 37].^{6.1}

6.1. This notion of spatio-temporal individuality likens the aura with autonomy, however the two are not interchangeable. Because the autonomous is not directly related to sensory experience, it cannot be similarly directly analogous to aura [Yarnold, 2009: 217]. But since the autonomous object exists as a 'thing-for-itself' (in refutation of heteronomy), it has a quality of defying conceptual analysis and *contemplation* becomes the primary form of reception of the work [Yarnold, 2009: 217]. This consequence of autonomy, not autonomy in itself, is what can be aligned with the Aura.

Appropriation.

Randall Van Schephen, a professor in Art history, wrote of 'aura' only becoming especially recognisable under the signs of its demise [2007: 4]. Reproduction, argued by Benjamin to mark its withering, in this sense makes us aware of the simultaneous presence and absence of the Aura. The political nature of Benjamin's *Work of Art...* essay provoked an analysis of this phenomena by the movement of Appropriation Art, prominent in the 1980s and 90s; and particularly Sherrie Levine, who came to be known in light of what she felt were 'narrow' interpretations of Benjamin [Van Schephen, 2007: 4-7]. Levine set out with her work to directly challenge Benjamin's conclusions on the direct relationship between reproduction and a withering of the aura. Levine's re-photography of well-known photographs were thus a postmodern intervention with 'politics of representation' [Van Schephen, 2007: 6-7] that Benjamin had established with his work.

The critical response to Levine was centred on her 'assault' on art by undermining the 'sacred concepts' of traditionalist art. In particular she challenged the idea of *authorship*, in the form of authorial intent and as an expression of originality [Van Schephen, 2007: 7].^{6.2} Levine's precise reproductions were intended to invoke the uncanny 'doppelganger-effect:' to generate a difficulty in distinguishing the work of the author and the work of the appropriatist, especially given the consistent encounter with the original subject of the

6.2. An aspect also critical to architects [Hill, 2006]. Hill describes how often architects prefer to claim designs as theirs by name, despite the collaborative nature of the practice.

art. ^[fig. 6.i] Through *reproduction*, Levine sought to create a new kind of aura steeped in the mystique arising from an inability to easily grasp the source of the artistic interventions, and the sense of ‘desire’ enhanced by this *distancing* [Van Schephen, 2007: 8].

Where Levine generated *aura* from the employment of a very specific *reproduction*, in was in direct opposition to the ‘narrow’ understandings of Benjamin that the two were incompatible. Van Schephen [2007: 9] notes that though Levine’s critics condemned her undermining of authorial intent, a parallel argument could be put forth that the subject within the work is in a sense ‘preserved’ through iterative reproduction. Levine’s appropriations sought to generate works that had as much aura as their references, to exploit ‘the tension produced between two virtually indistinguishable auratic originals’ [Van Schephen, 2007: 10]. These tensions and fluctuations, between original, reproduction, and aura, were what Levine highlighted and challenged within her work. Their relationship to the experiences argued for by Rothko and Benjamin provide the undercurrent of ideas for the design work in this thesis. There are two distinct elements to this work. First, a series of preparatory studies and experimental drawings and models that represent an initial exploration of the themes within this section. These are discussed below. Secondly, a larger, more focused architectural design project arising from these studies that is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Mapping David Antin’s ‘the existential allegory of the rothko chapel.’

My first aim was to experiment with a way to draw out an experience of the type Rothko and Benjamin were invested in. This meant a language of drawing that was ‘in-between’ art object and architectural drawing, but decisively neither. Beginning with the Rothko Chapel, I derived the abstract qualities of scale and proportion in a quite mathematical way, by looking at surface area.

Starting with a single wall in the octagonal Chapel (its East), I identified two types of area that could be calculated: wall area, and the area defined by ‘openings:’ doors, in this case. This could be interpreted within Rothko’s art, too – where the base area was derived from the planar dimensions of his canvas, and where the dimensions of the color-fields ‘within’ the canvas are treated as ‘openings’ with a similarly calculable area. ^[fig. 6.ii]

So not to give preference to either art or architectural convention at this stage, I drew these (scaled) surface areas as radiating equally out on all four cardinal axes from an abstract center point on the page. This resulted in the areas for both the art and the architecture (wall) being drawn in the same language: *lines, forming a square, on a page, describing a proportion*, stripped of every other material aspect but for these measures. ^[fig. 6.iii] The first drawings took the surface area as a cumulative value, resulting in one square with a dotted

fig. 6.i. (top) Michael Mandiberg, *Untitled* (AfterWalkerEvans.com/1.jpg), 3250px x 4250 px (at 850dpi), 2001. An original photograph authored by Walker Evans.

(bottom) Michael Mandiberg, *Untitled* (AfterSherrieLevine.com/1.jpg), 3250px x 4250 px (at 850dpi), 2001. An appropriation of Walker Evans by Sherrie Levine.

Authority is deferred to the caption.

fig. 6.ii. *Study Drawing 1. Detail. East Wall, Schematic Elevation.*

fig. 6.iii. (Left) *Study Drawing 1*. Detail. East Wall, diagrammed surface area.

fig. 6.iv. (Far Left) *Study Drawing 1*. Detail. East Wall, diagrammed surface area: redistributed centers.

fig. 6.v. *Study Drawing 1*. Detail. East Wall, same-spatial occupation of art and architecture on drawn sheet.

square (depicting the area of the combined openings) within. In another set I experimented with redistributing the center points of each object of solid or opening, proportionally, about the center point on its y-axis. ^[fig. 6.iv] This was to distinguish the elements as separate.

Finally, I added a third dimension through parallel projection of these squares, with a 'depth' dimension derived from the value of darkness within each element. ^[fig. 6.v] For example, the wall, being lighter than the canvas was not represented with the same depth; and similarly the 'fields' within the canvases were slightly darker than the 'ground' color of the canvas object, and so was drawn with a greater depth. These depth values pushed out equally from the 'Z' axis. Working on the principle that absolute black (100% 'darkness') would represent a 1.0 multiplication of that object's identical height-width value, the abstract wireframes formed were thus a very proportional representation.

I combined the axonometric projections of these abstract ‘presences,’ in both drawn iterations, from the same center point. This creates the effect of the art and the architecture (now in a transformed language that is decisively neither) interpenetrating one another, occupying the same ‘space,’ metaphorically and materially.

In a further development, I applied similar principles to another wall (the South), bearing another canvas.^[fig. 6.vi] With this development there was a comparative elaboration in measuring the area of the wall, where I looked at visible rather than total area. This was important in that there was a further proportional relationship gained in the drawing system: the larger the ‘presence’ of the *art* on the wall, the more the *architectural* ‘presence’ became diminished. Another adjustment to the system was in the re-distribution of center points per object, which I drew in proportional relation to the center point in *both* the y- (horizontal) and x- (vertical) axes.^[fig. 6.vii] This was to convey a sense of the optical ‘weighting’ of elements within a visual field. I re-applied these new rules to the original Eastern Wall to make a comparison.^[fig. 6.viii]

fig. 6.vi. Study Drawing 2. Detail. South Wall, Schematic Elevation.

fig. 6.vii. Study Drawing 2. Detail. South Wall. [1] reductive canvas mass; [2] center redistribution on x- and y-axes, [3] translation into axonometric.

[1]

[2]

fig. 6.viii. [1] Study Drawing 3. Overview. Re-applied drawing system to original East wall (ref. fig 6.v for comparison).

[2] 1:1 detail of drawn interpretations of solid and void (opening), East Wall.

Having made these drawings for individual walls I decided to look at the combined effect within a spatial system. In a sense, I intended to 'draw out' the *affect* of the Rothko Chapel. To retain the rigour of my abstraction I drew the combined art-architecture wireframes relative to a centrifugal center point within the volume of the Rothko Chapel space. I reconceived the Chapel as a space that was a unilateral 'volume' (cube) representative of its real volume (in m^3 , drawn to scale). Each wall, taken as proportionately relative to the center point in real space, was then drawn as distributed true to this relationship in the space being formed in the drawing. ^(fig. 6.ix)

fig. 6.ix. Study Drawing 4: Rothko Chapel system. 1:1 Detail.

[1] Abstract center point within Rothko Chapel 'volume', in both real and represented space.

[2] West wall elements (walls, openings, canvases, fields, as per figs. 6.iii-6.viii) drawn in relationship to one another; *re-distributed* in relation to center point of drawing, proportionally.

The resulting drawing, drawn in relationships true to space, began to resemble architectural drawing. That is, as a work in itself – *an object contemplated* – it began to shift back towards how the Rothko chapel would be represented in traditional axonometric projection. In an attempt to see the drawing as an autonomous work (as opposed to a projection into another space) I made several observations best reflected through annotations on the drawing itself. [fig. 6.x]

As a last extrapolation to the series, I aimed to engage with the spatio-temporality of Rothko's art, and specifically the aspects of experiencing the chapel to do with visibility, relativism, and memory. I used David Antin's writing – which had formed a recurrent reference through this thesis for its firsthand

fig. 6.x. Study Drawing 4: Rothko Chapel system. Detail (handwritten annotations omitted).

[1] Axial 'North' within the space of the axonometric drawing. For all intents and purposes, distances and angles were measured relative to this line in axonometric projection; [2] South Wall. The mural on this wall has been cited by critics as marking a 'departure' for Rothko. It most closely resembles his work prior to the Chapel commission; [3] (Clockwise from marker) NW, NE, SE, SW wing walls. Due to their geometric placement in the architecture, these walls are read as moments of 'flattening' in axonometric convention. Poetically, they can be read as *ma* (or pause, see Chapter 3 subsection, 'Azuma House'); [4] North Wall. Reading the art (red) elements in the whole system, a pattern of 'compression' – where these abstract 'presences' impede each other – forms from least severe (South Wall) to most severe (North Wall). If the South wall is read as a 'departure', the North Wall, lacking in color-fields entirely, forms a 'statement' of a new artistic project.

account of the cognitive complexity of Rothko's Chapel works – as a reference for the mapping exercise. Antin's text recounts a specific experience that involves moments of comparison, of looking closer, then retreating to see more. Conceiving of the visual contemplation of art and architecture as defined by singular perspective, this series of drawings set to re-imagine the drawing of movement through a shift in relativity. In short, the spatial elements would move *around* the subject, and not vice versa. The intent behind this was to destabilise the architectural convention that I felt the preparatory drawing of the chapel had slipped back into. Because this exercise would involve a lot of iterative drawing (capturing various moments of Antin's textual description to generate a graphic representation of it), I took the model into the computer. This involved a few re-calculations for the parameters of the original drawing as a result of human error, that I collated into a table of data for a correct reproduction of the 'drawn space' within the virtual space of CAD. ^[fig. 6.xi]

Unit	Dist. from Origin.	Angle (from N)	Square Root (Area)	Depth (Factor)	Redist. of cr. (y)	Redist. of cr. (x)	[Cubed Root (Volume)]
Chapel entire	0	0	17.41 (303.15m ²)	0	0	0	11.96 (1709.77m ³)
N Apse wall (visible)	9.92	0	3.90 (15.21m ²)	0.59 (0.15)	0	0	---
N Center monochrome	9.62	0	3.52 (12.39m ²)	2.99 (0.85)	0	0	---
N L/R monochromes	9.62	---	3.34 (11.16m ²)	2.84 (0.85)	0	±1.71	---
N Apse flanking walls	10.25	±27.5	4.39 (19.27m ²)	0.66 (0.15)	0	0	---
N Back wall	10.56	0	6.90 (47.61m ²)	1.04 (0.15)	0	0	---
Wing walls (visible)	8.84	±45/135	3.26 (10.63m ²)	0.49 (0.15)	0	0	---
Wing wall monochromes	8.54	±45/135	5.24 (27.46m ²)	4.45 (0.85)	0	0	---
E/W walls (visible)	8.12	±90	4.42 (19.54m ²)	0.66 (0.15)	0.66	0	---
E/W wall openings	8.12	±90	1.75 (3.07m ²)	1.75 (1.00)	-1.71	±1.90	---
E/W wall center canvas	7.82	±90	3.22 (10.35m ²)	2.42 (0.75)	0.20	0	---
E/W wall center color-field	7.82	±90	3.02 (9.12m ²)	2.87 (0.95)	0.20	0	---
E/W wall L/R canvases	7.82	±90	2.53 (6.40m ²)	1.90 (0.75)	-0.20	±2.21	---
E/W wall L/R color-fields	7.82	±90	2.33 (5.43m ²)	2.21 (0.95)	-0.20	±2.21	---
E/W flanking walls	10.25	±62.5/±117.5	4.39 (19.27m ²)	0.66 (0.15)	0	0	---
E/W entrance walls	10.56	±90	6.72 (45.09m ²)	1.01 (0.15)	0.19	0	---
E/W entrance openings	10.56	±90	1.58 (2.51m ²)	1.58 (1.00)	-3.81	0	---
S wall (visible)	8.12	180	5.64 (31.81m ²)	0.85 (0.15)	0.59	0	---
S wall openings	8.12	180	1.75 (3.07m ²)	1.75 (1.00)	-2.18	±2.43	---
S wall canvas	7.82	180	4.19 (17.56m ²)	3.14 (0.75)	-0.71	0	---
S wall color-field	7.82	180	2.98 (8.88m ²)	2.83 (0.95)	0.56	0	---
S foyer flanking walls	14.40	157.5/202.5	5.10 (26.01m ²)	0.77 (0.15)	0	0	---
S main entrance wall	12.69	180	6.40 (40.96m ²)	0.96 (0.15)	0.52	0	---
S main entrance opening	12.69	180	2.59 (6.69m ²)	2.59 (1.00)	-3.63	0	---
Ceiling (visible)	5.98	90 (z-axis)	14.61 (213.42m ²)	2.27 (0.15)	0.62	0	---
Ceiling (E/W bay)	5.98	90 (z-axis)	4.22 (17.81m ²)	0.63 (0.15)	0	±9.34	---
Ceiling (S lobby)	5.98	90 (z-axis)	6.21 (38.57m ²)	0.93 (0.15)	-10.57	0	---
Skylight opening	5.98	90 (same)	5.70 (32.47m ²)	5.70 (1.00)	0	0	---
Floor Mass	-5.98	-90 (z-axis)	17.41 (303.15m ²)	2.61 (0.15)	0	0	---

fig. 6.xi. Table of calculations for re-modeling of Chapel drawing (fig. 6.x) within a CAD environment. The table is absolute, correcting several human errors in the drawing to ensure a consistent conformity of all elements to the rigid system of logic established in *Study Drawings 1-3*.

In drawings that resulted, the moving object is a *stable point* on the page, but a *moving point* within the virtual volume of the chapel. Representationally, the 'field' of vision is drawn as a 30° cone emerging from the subject's axial north, shown ink-lined within the drawing. ^[fig. 6.xii] This creates a relationship where the closer one becomes to a specific wall or canvas, the less one 'sees' of the surrounding field, as is true in reality. Conversely, the further one's physical distance, the more one can see of the spatial system – for example, Antin describes in his text points at which he '[retreated] to a distance at which I could take in three walls at a time' [2003].

fig. 6.xii. *Antin Series, Drawing 1. Detail.*

[1] Stable position of mapped subject: As the subject moves through the space (the larger 'cube', representative of the volume of the chapel drawn unilaterally in X-, Y-, and Z- directions), this drawn point remains fixed. Wireframes are as positioned relative to this point.

[2] Ink-lined section, denoting a 'field of vision' in the constraints of a 2-D system. N.B: Black vector lines additional to figure.

With each iteration, I wanted to engage with reproduction (physically, through scanning and re-printing) as an analogue for the metaphysical aspect of a fading memory. Consequently, each drawing is underlain with the drawing immediately preceding it in a reproduced form. As new moments of present experience assert themselves into the layer of drawing, previous drawings (exponentially degrading due to the effects of reproduced reproductions) begin to fade away. ^{fig. 6.xiii}

In each iteration the 30° field of vision is true to the object that, *at that moment*, Antin would be perceiving before him. But in the same layer, drawn in pencil, is the object that entered the field of vision in the prior drawing, drawn again relative to the current position. This was to indicate a subject cognitively trying to keep track of both *what he has just seen*, and *where that is relative to what he is now seeing*: a mode of moment-to-moment comparative contemplation. ^{fig. 6.xiv}

This process was repeated, working chronologically through the text until the space – and, simultaneously, one subject's experience of the space – was mapped in its entirety. Taken together, the drawings describe a cumulative experience where one attempts to 'master the space' [Antin, 2003: 128]. But the space slips out of intellectual grasp, it eventually becomes (experientially) 'opaque.' Immediate *contemplation* is imposed over analytical de-coding. The drawing's instrumental function – to 'project' into another spatial imaginary – is lost. The drawings can be read simultaneously two ways. Firstly as a description of a spatial experience of the Rothko Chapel (a reproduction of architecture) and secondly as an autonomous work that *confronts* space, to be contemplated as presences themselves (an object more similar to an artwork).

^{fig. 6.xv: pgs. 78-89} This insight formed the premise for the work discussed in Chapter Seven.

fig. 6.xiii. *Antin Series, Drawing 5*. 1:1 Detail. Multiple layers of drawing have developed in this detail section. *Drawing 5* is five layers 'deep' in total, each new layer drawn over a reproduction of the last, which itself was drawn over a reproduction of the last, and so on. The natural decay in the mechanical reproduction becomes a drawn analogue for the effects of a fading memory.

fig. 6.xiv. *Antin Series, Drawing 2*. Demonstration of the mapping system: [1] Fragment of South Wall immediately before the subject's view, shown ink-lined; [2] North- and fragments of Northeast/Northwest walls, seen the moment (layer) previous, a reproduction of *Drawing 1* (see fig. 6.xii); [3] N, NE & NW walls, drawn relative to the subject's *current* position as he attempts to keep track of his encounters.

fig. 6.xv. Antin Series, Drawings 1-12.
1:2 Reproduction of drawing series.

Artefacting a betrayal by Mechanical Reproduction – translations.

A caveat with the *Mapping...* exercise was the necessary simplicity with which I allocated values of 'darkness' to each object to give them depth. These values were surveyed from images and reproductions of both the Rothko Chapel and the murals it contained by digitally extracting a 'K' or Black value to points in the element (canvas or wall) to generate an average factor: 0.15, 0.85, 0.9, and so on. To cast these off as 'simplified' would be cursory as they worked for the scale and scope of those drawings in that they were describing in more general terms to investigate a combined effect. In reality there would be various differing degrees (factors) of darkness within any Rothko work. Even more, the 'Chimeric' experience of his canvases would open up to these values for darkness rapidly changing under varying lighting conditions. Translating the perceptual depth (or lack thereof) of 'darkness' within Rothko's work to a *literal, physical* depth at a much smaller scale – that of a single canvas – allowed an alternative investigation into the way the art might 'confront' space and the presencing associated with the spatiality of Rothko's art.

fig. 6.xvi. Mark Rothko, *Red on Maroon*, 1958. Reproduced (b/w) via MFD scan.

fig. 6.xvii. Mark Rothko, *Red on Maroon*, 1958. Reproduced (b/w) via Digital Photography.

I aimed to 'artefact' two very precise moments in time and space, describing two different encounters with the same art object, through Mechanical Reproduction. *Red on Maroon* (1958) was looked at in two ways. First was a scanning of a reproduction of the work from a Rothko monograph. Already a reproduction in itself, this scan was a 'view' from a machine's perspective: it could never be had by a perceiving, human subject. The colour was stripped from the scan so as to only have 'darkness' as a variable for the experiment.^[fig. 6.xvi] The second subject of experiment was a photograph of that reproduction, taken in normal lighting conditions from the perspective of a human eye, in an attempt to generate a singular moment of a human perceptual encounter with the artwork through reproduction.^[fig. 6.xvii]

My intent was to survey the 'dark' values of the canvas, not as a generalised 'average' value for the whole work, which was a qualitative arbitrariness that was a necessary limit to the pragmatics of the *Mapping...* project. With this experiment I aimed to survey at *regular intervals* over the entire canvas. To do this, I established a grid over the whole work with which to extract K-values, point by point. I digitally manipulated the photographed source to reflect the same pixel dimensions of the scanned source, so that they could each be surveyed with a consistency.^[fig. 6.xviii] I then extracted the values at each intersection of gridlines for both sources, to form two discrete sets of 'data' for the darkness within the canvas.^[fig. 6.xix]

fig. 6.xviii. (L-R) *Scanned source: Red on Maroon. Grid-line overlay; Photographed source: Red on Maroon. Digital manipulation.*

fig. 6.xix. *Photographed source: Red on Maroon. 1:1 Detail. A conceptual overlay of extracted 'darkness' values corresponding to the regular points on the canvas established through a gridline arrangement (see fig. 6.viii). Despite being reproduced from the same source or 'origin' reproduction, these point-by-point surveys made in the process were very different.*

fig. 6.xx. *Red on Maroon Series, Drawings 1 & 2. Overview.* (L-R) From *Scanned source* data-set; From *Photographed source* data-set. Here there is a direct visualisation of the differences in datasets discussed withing fig. 6.xix. These are two 'artefacted' moments within an encounter with the art. In reality these maps would be constantly 're-drawing' themselves through a shifting experience in space and time.

These data-sets allowed an analogue 'parametric' drawing, a translation of these studies back to the architectural convention of axonometric drawing, as a way to project 'space' onto a flattened surface.^[fig. 6.xx] To generate these drawings I took the gridline arrangement and projected them using axonometric convention. This base 'plane' became the mid-point, or a darkness value of 50. The darkness values were then plotted individually off the base 'plane', line by line, and to scale (1:20 relative to the original canvas).^[fig. 6.xxi] The cumulative effect of the lines invoked a 3-dimensional representation of the painting in a new convention. The same process was applied to the second data-set. This allowed a graphic assessment of an effect that visually translated the misrepresentation of art within a reproduction. *Red on Maroon Series, Drawing 2* sits in a tensive opposition to *Drawing 1*. It's significant defects disrupt the 'purity' of the reproduction of the art evident in *Drawing 1*, yet despite this *Drawing 2* was drawn from the source more clearly representative of a 'human' encounter with the reproduced art.^[fig. 6.xxii]

fig. 6.xxi. *Red on Maroon Series, Drawing 1*. 1:1 Detail. [1] Axonometric projection of gridline arrangement; [2] K-values drawn in projection off this base plane.

fig. 6.xxii. *Red on Maroon Series, Drawings 1 & 2*. 1:2 Detail. A moment of difference within encounters where reproduction – taken through a drawing process – becomes artefact.

fig. 6.xxiii. *Red on Maroon Series, Model 1. Perspective.*

A final mode of translation was to move the experiments into a embodied space through architectural modeling. Where the drawings had suggested a spatiality on the picture plane, this last translation was to create an object that interacted with and confronted real space. With laser-cut card modeling, I was able to translate the data-sets for each source reproduction to create a set of abstract 'topographical' representations of the surfaces of Rothko's canvases.^{fig. 6.xxiii} As abstract data points derived from values for 'darkness,' the final transformation of the points back into objects with a literal depth created 'pockets' of shadow between the intersecting section planes that, predictably, artefact the sense of 'betrayal' of the effect of the original. This is apparent when the model derived from the *scanned source (Model 1)* is compared with the model derived from the *photographed source (Model 2)*.^{fig. 6.xxiv}

Skewed 45° along their width, the models imitate the drawings from which they derive, and are made to the same scale (1:20 relative to the original canvas) to invite a comparison. The models, however, project outwards as opposed to the perpendicular 45° used to depict the third dimension in axonometric drawing. This creates a difficulty in attempting to make this comparison. The viewer must constantly shift in relation to the object in an attempt to 'synchronise' the ways of seeing the object. The drawings and models made represent one artefacted moment in time and space. But now operating within real space, the objects again reclaim an aspect of the original: a constantly shifting experience in close relationship to one's shifting perspective in beholding it.^{fig. 6.xxv}

fig. 6.xxiv. (L-R) *Red on Maroon Series, Model 1* (Scanned source); *Red on Maroon Series, Model 2* (Photographed source). The formal expression of both models invites a comparison to the drawings they are derived from (see fig. 6.xx).

fig. 6.xxv. *Red on Maroon Series, Models 1 & 2. Sequential Perspectives.*

The present subject shifts in relation to the objects of reproduction, now undeniably confronting real space. As this occurs, the object transforms into a moment-to-moment experience.

While interesting as an experiment and somewhat successful in re-creating a spatial experience, this second series of exercises were not addressing the issues of space in the manner Rothko sought. They underscored a singular point and were fit for their purpose (of exposing and visualizing a ‘betrayal’ by reproduction), but left little open to further questioning in the way the first series of exercises allowed. Their objecthood as drawings and models in themselves immediately placed viewers ‘outside’ of the experience, ‘looking on’ to it. In part due to the scale of his works, Rothko was interested in an experience ‘inside’ of his work. In this respect the ‘interpenetration’ of the drawing allowed with the first series of studies – the ability to read and ‘inhabit’ the work on multiple levels, were more successful. As the following Chapter will describe in more detail, this first series served as the foundation for its project.

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Figures.

fig. 6.i. (top down) Mandiberg, 2001a; 2001b.

III | Thematic application: from *speed-dial* to *presence*.

The disparate thematic elements of Aura are in this section of the thesis given an assessment through application within an architectural design project. Such an application is not 'full' or comprehensive in any way. Rather, conceptions of the Aura as tested in the textual side of this work are allowed to slip into in the project in an emergent manner. The analysis and discussion of the aims and outcomes of this experimental work – the conscious and subconscious applications of the theory – make up the body of Section III.

The dirursive aspect of this Research by Design thesis propels a series of speculative conclusions of the relevance of this work at a wider scope than this text.

Seven | *house for Rothko.*

The culminating design work for this thesis extrapolated the concept of *real spatial* confrontation, questioning the assumed relationship between the drawing (the *object*) and ‘space’ (its *subject*). This design problem arose from the acknowledgement (at a critical point in the thesis) that to truly engage with Rothko’s spatial ideas would pose a *re-presentational* issue. Rothko’s work was, at its core, resistant to the representational ‘vestiges’ into pictorial ‘space.’ Rather they were a literal presence in the room – scaled to the room, and affecting those within the room. They were *presentational*, not *re-presentational*.

My work took the form of an installation of a series of drawings that both described a spatial imaginary,^{7.1} and engaged with a very real, direct relationship with the real space of their siting. I called this project *house for Rothko*, and this chapter aims to achieve the triumvirate of documenting it and engaging it in a discussion from two points of view: personally as the designer, and speculatively as a member of the ‘audience.’ The text of this chapter follows this order, describing the project first through its theory and pragmatic execution, before moving into a critical analysis of its outcomes.

Housing.

The project was titled *house for Rothko* to invoke a Benjaminian level of linguistic difficulty.^{7.2} The term ‘house’ has multiple meanings, principally *to* ‘house’ (to contain or occupy) or *a* ‘house’ (the built construct associated with ‘home’). Similarly, I propose the term ‘Rothko’ has also: the *artist*, his *art*,^{7.3} or more challenging, a metaphysical affect associated with his art – not the art itself, but a visual or experiential *feeling* the art achieved at its most direct and effective. Any interpretation is of course beyond my personal determination, but my aim was for a work in which either, any or all of these combinations of meanings can be valid.

Place-lessness.

Where the Rothko Chapel was discussed earlier as an exemplar for Rothko’s project spatially and artistically,^{7.4} this project sought a return to the ‘origin’ of the ideas that culminated in the chapel – namely, the much more fraught commission Rothko undertook for the Seagram. As Chapter Five raised, the Seagram was for Rothko his first chance at creating ‘a place contained and absolutely mine’ [Rothko, 1960], to work in ensembles and modulate a spatial-environmental feeling. Having ultimately failed at creating that installation, though, the Seagram Murals can now be said to be *place-less*. Rather than

7.1. To an extent: this design work directly addresses the issue of an architectural drawing’s function to describe spatial imaginaries. This aspect is returned to later in the Chapter.

7.2. In discussing Walter Benjamin’s self-provided definition of ‘Aura’ in the preface to Section II, I wrote of his deliberately slight offering – he simply described it as ‘a strange weave of space and time’ – as a potentially subversive technique in generating a sense of truth.

7.3. As raised in Chapter One, signature compositions once arrived at by Abstract Expressionists tended to be referred to by name: ‘a Rothko,’ ‘a Pollock,’ and so on.

7.4. The chapel is referenced in the latter stages of Chapter Two, and provides is a major reference for the discussion of Rothko’s art throughout Chapters Three and Four.

7.5. Benjamin's writing of 'tradition' [1936: 220] refers to all factors that give an original its 'traces' of originality. Here the contested status of the Seagram project, Rothko's spatial ambitions, his refusal of the project and so on become 'traces' in the legacy or tradition of the original Seagram murals.

creating a place together, they are now dispersed throughout various galleries around the world. This 'tradition,' in Benjamin's terms,^{7.5} is now inexplicably a part of the 'Aura' of the Seagram commission. The only *true* place for the Seagram Murals now exists in some ambiguous sphere, 'between' three spaces. These are what I will call the space *in* (Rothko's work space, the studio at 222 Bowery, Manhattan where the murals were made); the space *for* (the Seagram); and an elusive third space I will call the space *of* (Michelangelo's *ricetto*, discussed in Chapter Five as an 'unconscious model' for Rothko's commission). In response, then, to this *place-lessness*, this project aimed to create a 'place' for Rothko's Seagram Murals, not just as works of art but for the spatial affect they would induce together. It was a 'house' for preservation of the specific spatiality that Rothko began with this series. If the former is considered purely a poetic grounding or 'rationale,' then the latter more pragmatically addresses questions of immediacy, authenticity and space central to this thesis.

Slippage: *site* and *programme*.

A physical *between* site was impossible, this much was acknowledged. The studio is sited in lower Manhattan, the Seagram in mid-town Manhattan, the *ricetto* in Florence. They could never exist together in a site. The design of an *authentic* place for the Seagram Murals, *between* these three spaces, could *only* exist in 'abstract' space, the space of drawing. The next subsection will describe in detail the technicalities of how I engaged with these multiple simultaneously occurring spaces; for now I want to convey the conception.

The project dealt with cardinal directions. Each space – the studio, the Seagram, the *ricetto* – consisted of a north, south, east and west wall. The installation itself was a wrap-around set-up: it also consisted of north, south, east and west walls. Each wall in the installation described *only* that corresponding wall in the drawn space: the north held drawings of the north wall(s), the south drawings of the south wall(s), and so on.^[fig. 7.i] In each drawing these fragments of wall fall *in and out of phase* on the picture plane of the drawing, as an analogue for both a physically moving subject within space, and an artists' psychological space where thoughts of these sites fall in and out of attentive 'focus.' I will return to this idea in the next subsection.

In making the work I was consciously invested in the idea of *slippage*. This occurred on three levels, the first being site. The architecture of the project is both in the 'space between' the three spaces that (as mentioned previously) can exist only in representation (the drawings), and simultaneously in the room, literally, of the installation. Secondly, as designer of the work I wanted to invoke a slippage for the audience in their inability to place or *source* the design interventions. The 'design' (or 'architecture') is at once in 'there' – the virtual space of the drawings; and in 'here' – the real space of the installation, in terms of the pragmatic arrangement of panels, the sequence and orientation of the hang of the drawings, and so on. Finally, there was a slippage in programme. I have already mentioned my aim at achieving a 'house for Rothko,' but there

fig. 7.i. (facing page) *house for Rothko*. Overview, looking Southwest. Each wall describes only that corresponding wall in the virtual space of the drawing: North for North, South for South, and so on.

Exhibition of the works of the artist, showing the evolution of his architectural and interior design projects. The exhibition is divided into two main sections: the first section shows the artist's early work, and the second section shows his more recent work. The exhibition is a comprehensive overview of the artist's career, from his early architectural studies to his current work as a leading architect and interior designer.

7.6. Refer to Chapter Six of this text for my discussion of both.

7.7. For example, one might simply say 'United' to refer to the Manchester United football team.

fig. 7.ii. house for Rothko, sketches. Plan and Axonometric. The panel arrangement would delimit an 'interior' space, that acts as a metaphysical 'container' for an interaction between the panels.

was an awareness that this might not necessarily be the function 'received' by the audience. Speculatively I anticipated the work might be read as an autonomous art installation, a 'memorial,' a documentation of a drawing process, a psychological mapping, or a behavioural 'experiment' not uncommon within campuses of Schools of Architecture. As with titling the project, programme was deferred to the viewer, something each audience member unconsciously intuited for themselves. Following the study of Sherrie Levine's appropriations (and my own *Antin Series* drawings),^{7.6} these slippages were a strategy of *distancing* aimed at invoking 'Aura.'

Spatial synecdoche: drawing multiple space.

A synecdoche is a function of language where a part stands for its whole, or vice versa.^{7.7} Here I have applied it to space. Architecture has long had a mediating function in the drawing, where the drawing 'describes' architecture. The drawing is a part that *is of the* 'whole' of the architectural object. Taken as a concept a spatial synecdoche is where the drawing (the 'part') *is* the whole; drawing *is* architecture. This directness in communication is the undercurrent of Rothko's art. Painting for Rothko *was* space, and this project experimented with architectural drawing *as* space in a similar way, where (again, building upon my *Antin Series* study) drawing is not *representational*, but *presentational* – that is, invoking the *presence* and immediacy of spatial encounter. If the reproduction of space is in the representation of space, then the 'origin' or Aura of space is in its *presentation*.

To achieve this effect I conceived of drawn (virtual) space and real space as integral to one another. A change to one drawing on the north would alter the east, west, and south drawings, and so on.^[fig. 7.iii] As with the previous studies, I needed to arrive at a system of representation to explore these ideas. For the drawn spaces, it was important to distinguish a hierarchy for what would be a representation of concentric spaces (the studio 'inside' the Seagram, which in turn was 'inside' the *ricetto*) to establish that these were *separate* spaces, existing *within the same virtual space* of the drawing. Recalling how the *Antin Series* provided a moment of 'flattening' when the 45° wing walls were drawn in axonometric,^[fig. 7.iii] this became the drawing principle for depicting a difference between the studio as imagined, projected, tangible space; and at the other extreme the *ricetto*, as a 'flattened' representation or 'subconscious' influence that would appear as image, rather than 'space.' I tested this effect in drawing exercises, looking at how spaces drawn in plan translate to axonometric convention.^[fig. 7.iv] Building on the understanding taken from the *Antin Series* exercise, I imagined the studio plan as drawn on the axes parallel to the edges of a page: this would project into axes of 45° in the drawing. I continued this study with the north walls of both the Seagram and the *ricetto*. If the *ricetto*'s northern wall was imagined as on 45° axes in plan, they would project into a flattened facade elevation in the drawing. The seagram, as stepped in-between, would thus need to be drawn on axes 22.5° in both plan and axonometric projection.

fig. 7.iii. [Antin Series] Study Drawing 4:
Rothko Chapel System. Detail.

fig. 7.iv. house for Rothko, Study Drawing 1.[1] Rothko's studio plan and north elements: a scaled canvas, a moveable partition wall, the north wall of the space. These are projected on axes of 45° . We can conventionally understand a 'real' space on these axes; [2] The Seagram's north wall, drawn on axes of 22.5° ; [3] The *ricetto* north wall, correctly drawn in axonometric but appearing as flattened 'image.'

7.8. The 'north' of the drawing space, for all intents and purposes. Refer to Chapter Six, where I first raise the idea of 'axial north' in describing fig. 6.x.

To achieve the effect of having real-spatial consequences to the drawn space, I carried this system over to a drawing for the south wall.^[fig. 7.v] In real space, the viewer of these drawings would require a physical turn to survey the drawing on the panel behind. In a sense, the subject would have a new 'north.' This resulted in a reconfigured 'axial north'^{7.8} in the drawing. For *Drawing 2*, I underlaid *Drawing 1* (shown halftone in the figure) and traced the exact same point of the subject's 'position'. I used this point to rotate the floorplan to reflect the new orientation of the viewer. *Drawing 2* describes the South wall elements, but they project off the axial north of the drawing, which is 'local' to a true reflection of a subject viewing it.

The studio space, being the most immediate to Rothko (and the viewer), could be re-drawn and understood: it was the 'closest' to the point of rotation. In a difficult step I attempted to draw the South Wall of the Seagram as interrelated to the north in *Drawing 1*, on the same axes of projection (22.5° relative to the edge of the page) and with the same proximity to the center point. Because I had taken the exact same point with which to begin the drawing – reflective of the artist in space, a representation of a subject 'within' the drawing, and a representation of the viewer 'within' the installation – I quickly exhausted the space on the paper. When it came to attempting the same for the *ricetto*'s south wall, I found its position did not even register on the page. These fragments of south wall were *out of phase* to the north wall, where the subject mapped was facing. My authorial input to at least three of four drawings at a time was diminished. The south, east, and west walls for this phase of drawings were affected by the content of the north drawing, where the elements were *in phase*.

The convoluted nature of this system required simpler means to refine it. In a series of smaller drawings, dealing mainly with the distribution and variation of the 'origin' axes and approximate volumes of the wall fragments, I tested how a full phase of four drawings would work.^[fig. 7.vi] In the drawings there were many errors. This was natural, given I was attempting to keep track of multiple 'realities,' in a sense, in analogue. I made note of these mistakes in several annotations on the drawings themselves. Once I had a grasp on the system I moved the project into CAD. While *Study Drawings 3-6* were included as part of the documentation, the drawing system is more clearly described through the CAD work.

fig. 7.v. house for Rothko, Study Drawing 2. Overlay.

[1] The precise point on the page from the north drawing (*Drawing 1*) is carried over in the south drawing (*Drawing 2*). The plan is rotated about this point with a new, reconfigured 'axial north'; [2] despite the viewer in space not being oriented toward the south (the elements are 'in phase' in the north drawing), the physical proximity of the southern wall elements – canvases, partition walls, and built walls – are still in drawn proximity. As such these walls 'appear' within the drawing in a tangible parallel projection as per convention; [3] Fragment of the Seagram's south wall defined by the position of the north wall in the previous drawing. The 'out of phase' elements within this drawing quickly exhaust the space on the paper. The co-ordinates for placing the south wall of the *ricetto* space do not register on the sheet of paper.

fig. 7.vi. house for Rothko, Study Drawings 3-6. Annotations reproduced in type.

fig. 7.vii. house for Rothko, sketches for phase 02 onwards. Plan.

Annotations on the top drawing read: Orient viewer with another cardinal perpendicular (maybe slightly rotated 10°) – then challenge the phases by appropriating inbetween eg focal point – at NW, SE corners, more predominantly in one ‘field’ over another.

fig. 7.ix. house for Rothko. Aerial Over-view, looking Northeast. ‘Real space’ between panels of drawings. The drawings have an allowance for this space.

After sketching how the arrangement of wall fragments might appear in plan, [fig. 7.vii] I modeled them in the CAD environment. [fig. 7.viii] The facing page is one instance of the digital setup. Here the plan of the studio is drawn in full, with one’s mapped position in the space marked by intersecting lines, $a\{r\}$. The north wall elements of the studio on the north drawing would be drawn in axonometric projection relative to this point. Twice the distance between the subject in the ‘real space’ of the studio is the north wall of the Seagram building $b\{v\}$, drawn on axes of 22.5° in ‘virtual space’ (i.e., the ‘space’ outside the studio floorplan as drawn). The x-axis line of the Seagram, $b\{x\}$, is then projected back to meet the x-axis line of the studio fragments, $a\{x\}$, at an abstract point, $\{a\}$, that acts as a ‘pivot’ for the elements. From this point a 45° line is drawn forming the x-axis line for the *ricetto*, $c\{x\}$. In this way the ‘proximity’ of the wall fragments are directly related to one another – the closer the subject is to, say a partition wall inside of the studio (and so, the closer one physically is in surveying the art), the closer the equivalent walls in the Seagram and *ricetto* ‘appear.’

Lastly there was the issue of ‘real’ space. I wrote earlier that each wall would only describe that wall in the projected spaces in the drawing. What is seen on the facing page in plan would never be wholly described in a single drawing. Rather, its content would be fully represented only over the spread of the north, south, east and west drawings that make up that *phase*. The content of the drawings are reliant on an existence as an *ensemble* where their full effect is only understood together. The facing plan has an allowance for ‘real space’ – that is, the literal empty space between the panels of the installation setup. [fig. 7.ix] To show this in plan I traced an arc for the distance between the centerpoints for the secondary and tertiary north walls (the Seagram, $b\{v\}$, and the *ricetto*, $c\{v\}$) to the point where they meet the boundary of the studio space, to the respective y-axes for each, $b\{y\}$ and $c\{y\}$. Between the two marks (shown red-dashed in the facing plan, $b\{y.r\}$ and $c\{y.r\}$) was the ‘real space.’ In-between these points I allowed a distance equal to the length of the studio before continuing to arrange the opposing wall fragments. This is where the drawing would stop describing space, and transact into the literal space of the installation, where the content would ‘pick’ up on the re-oriented opposing wall. [fig. 7.x: pgs. 114–115] This ‘real space,’ as represented in the drawing, was bisected by an equilateral second line, perpendicular to $b\{y\}$ and $c\{y\}$ (and so parallel with $b\{x\}$ and $c\{x\}$). These would determine the center points for the placement of eastern, southern, and western fragments in ‘virtual’ space ($b\{v\}$ and $c\{v\}$) respectively. The computer allowed me to quickly draw parallel projections, correct to the system I had developed, once these elements were set in place for the phase of drawings. From the facing plan, I drew north, south, east, and west drawings for *phase 05*. [fig. 7.xi: pgs. 116–117] The *phase 05* drawings, like the *Antin Series*, were built upon degrading reproductions of the phases previous: *phase 04*, *03*, *02*, and so on. Ten phases in total, *house for Rothko* took some principles from the *Antin Series* study and brought an added dimension of complexity in confronting the problems of real space.

fig. 7.viii. house for Rothko, phase 05.
Plan. A plan view of the fragments of
space arranged in a CAD environment.

Notations:

The three spaces within the system are
marked by *a* (studio), *b* (seagram), and
c (*ricetto*) respectively.

The brackets that follow contain vari-
ables for those points but are associ-
ated to either *a*, *b*, or *c*. (x) and (y)
define the x- and y- axes for that space. (v)
and (r) define 'virtual' and 'real' points
within space, or on axes. E.g., *b*(v) is
the *virtual* center for a wall fragment as-
sociated with space *b* (seagram). *b*(y.r)
is the point where the *y-axis* for space *b*
(seagram) transacts to *real* space. The
drawing does not describe real space
except for as a dotted line; *real space*
describes *real space* (see fig. 7.x).

$c\{y.r\}$

transaction to 'real space'.

ove) North
monstration
space.

b(y.r)
continuation of North Drawing.

fig. 7.xi. house for Rothko, phase 05.
 (clockwise from bottom-left, facing
 page) South, North, East and West
 drawings. 1:2 Detail.

fig. 7.xii. *house for Rothko*. Studies in Multiple-exposure. A (humanly impossible) simultaneous view of multiple panels.

fig. 7.xiii. *house for Rothko*. Views from eye level. (Top down) West; South panels. Due to their scale and proximity only limited drawings can be viewed at once.

Prior to the completion of the drawings for the installation, I was already aware of the requirement for their reproduction in a thesis format. Given the real spatial nature of the work in both concept and execution I was conscious to the issues this would cause. In a smaller sketchbook study I experimented with how the work might be reproduced in a bound document format. I exploited the act of turning a page as analogous to a re-orientation of a viewer in real space. That one is never able to survey all the drawings at any one time (due in part to their scale as well as their position) (fig. 7.xii) was an aspect of the spatiality of the drawings, in that they encouraged a moment-to-moment comparison while never offering the respite of a comprehensive view. In the following figures, I present the project in three formats. First, a photographic documentation of the real spatial arrangement of the installation (this spread); (figs. xiii & xiv) second, my study in reproducing this in a bound document format, (fig. xv: pgs. 120–121) and lastly an amplification of scale of that study for its presentation within *this* document. (fig. xvi: pg. 122–)

fig. 7.xiv. *house for Rothko*. Overviews. (above) General Perspective; (facing page) Interior, looking Northeast.

fig. 7.xv. Study for a bound document reproduction.

[UP]

• [phase01]

• [phase02]

[NORTH]

[WEST]

[EAST]

[SOUTH]

[WEST]

WEST

[WEST]

[EAST]

[NORTH]

[SOUTH]

[WEST]

fig. 7.xvi. (p. 122-147) *house for Rothko*, phases 01-10. Reproduction of (in sequence) North, South, East, West drawing series. Not to scale.

Authorial reproduction.

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original ... A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility.

—Walter Benjamin [1923: 78]

To summarise this project I will lastly address it critically with a discussion on my intent with the work and its critical feedback. This serves as an ‘internal’ conclusion to this thesis – that is, a conclusion arriving from an application of the research to the project itself. I will follow this with a more formal ‘external’ conclusion for the thesis that addresses how the conclusions here relate to the greater architectural discipline outside of the extents of this project.

7.9. It was noted that Rothko was obsessively particular about his canvases at a material level, in the preparation and treatment of the physical surfaces.

7.10. This involved many considerations of what might be ‘literal’ and what might not. For example, the basic use of geometric arrangement and orientation in space – and particularly scale – were important to the architectural argument. Material concerns were in general less so, however the project did refer to the literalism of the art object in its medium (see fig. 7.xvii). Poetically it suggested that, as an object, it was nothing more than a presence before the viewer, in contrast to an architectural drawing made for the construction of built space.

fig. 7.xvii. *house for Rothko*, phase 04. South Drawing. Detail.

7.11. And consequently the convention of reading those techniques, for example the expectation of a drawing in axonometric or parallel projection.

7.12. The question is left to be answered whether it would maintain such affect outside of the eventful context in which it was primarily received. Short of re-constructing the installation for a smaller audience with a different set of expectations, I acknowledge this as a limitation to the conclusion drawn.

There are two major criticisms of the work I would like to address. The first was one of an absence of a ‘care’ – an artistic ‘particularity’ – in the preparation of the drawings. Central to this, I accept, was a skepticism of a ‘roughness’ in the drawings formally.^{7.9} This thesis has been a task of *translation* in both the text and in design. In this case it was a translation of Rothko’s spatial principles that, through several thematic threads of research, I have aligned with the Benjaminian idea of Aura (an investment in *presence* or an *immediacy* in experience that is lost in its many fields of reproduction or representation). To quote Benjamin [1923: 78], ‘a literal rendering of syntax demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning’: I had not purposefully followed Rothko’s brushing, use of colour, nor any other artistic technique, because the project was an exercise in finding the ‘intended effect’ of Rothko’s artistic project to produce ‘an echo of the original.’ This is not a reproduction of the original itself. In other words I have attempted to *reproduce* what Mark Rothko ‘authored’ – what he ‘said,’ not *how* he said it.^{7.10} (fig 7.xvii) This differs from (and challenges) Sherrie Levine’s appropriation, which sought to reproduce as perfectly as possible the literal ‘syntax’ of the original work to defer the author. Levine offers a provocation of the artwork’s Aura but little in the way of ‘mobilising’ that Aura by means other than the art object itself. With this thesis I have begun with an investigation into abstract art, but I have ended at the use of architectural techniques^{7.11} to employ Rothko in a discussion for architecture. This will be returned to in the final conclusion of the thesis.

The second critique was in the desire for the architectural ‘object,’ where it was raised that the work in large part held the audience in a mode of ‘suspense’ for the emergence of the designed ‘architecture’ (the ‘building’). This response was partly socio-cultural, in that in the context of the ‘event’ of a final-year architecture critique this ‘declaration of authorship’ was in some way expected.^{7.12} But it was also the achievement of one of my intents. The critique indicated it was successful in achieving a *distancing*, particularly in the inability to ‘grasp’ or ‘place’ the design, that was critical to the Aura and Rothko’s work

within space. In this an abstraction of several theories from *Section II* of the thesis re-appear. While some were conscious inclusions and others less so, all remain valid elements to the work:

—The space defined by the panels themselves is empty, and there is *emptiness* ‘within’ the panels, in a sense, in that they do not describe an architecture in a conventionally established way. The conventional function of the drawing to ‘project’ into another spatial imaginary is removed from the drawings,^{7.13} resulting in a sense that the expected gap in encountering an architectural reproduction is lost. Like Arden Reed’s interpretation of the shadow [1990: 15], the work exists as a representation coinciding with the represented.

7.13. The ‘spatial imaginary’ I refer to here is of a built structure, or one pending construction. This project is resistant to such an analytical decoding of drawing and rather privileges a moment-to-moment measuring. This has consequences for the final conclusion for the thesis.

—On a formal level there is *darkness* within the project. The drawing series gradually grows darker in hue, and at a point becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish layers of drawing and linework against the darkness of the drawing surface. More pertinent to the project is where darkness is understood as a *phenomenal* condition where ‘knowledge’ of the project – *objectivity*, that is – is difficult to obtain. This different mode of attention allows pereption to become ‘an aesthetic end in itself [that] should be prolonged’ [Schlovisky: Chave, 1989: 183]. To look at these drawings is to either perceive an infinite ‘space’ within, or a denial of ‘space’ and an object that returns the viewer to the literal space of their perception.

—Recalling the eastern philosophy of Kitaro Nishida (which presupposes no stable points),^{7.14} this work too is only understood in a comparative analysis (or *difference*). *Meaning*, in this sense, never ‘arrives’ for the viewer except in the difference between one encountered moment and the next. The content of the drawings is only revealed in the personal space of each viewer’s imaginative capacity, in forefronting understanding, recollection, and memory to organise or structure their experience.

7.14. I write in more depth on Nishida’s philosophy through Norman Bryson [Bryson, 1986] in Chapter Five, but to recount, Nishida’s example of a flower with two extremities of existence: seed, and dust. Where a flower in the West is merely a flower, in the East it is only one *phase* in the *difference* between the extremities of either seed or dust.

In my discussion, I will return to the idea of *slippage*. There exists a relationship between architect, building, and *architecture* as the transcendental realm of ideas which binds the two. This project aimed to *distance* the work of the architect and his or her tangible object, the building, in order to forefront the *aura* of the ideas of architecture or space. This was not to dismiss them, but in an experiment in spatiality to shift the focus momentarily away and assess what might happen. The major criticisms of the project were useful here. The first indicated a questioning driven by a difficulty in ‘placing’ my interventions. The second indicated a questioning of our relationship with drawing, and a desire for it ‘describe’ *building*. Rather than ‘describe’ architecture, the spatial synecdoche of the project aimed for an immediacy or proximity to the idea of architecture or ‘space.’ In other words this thesis project was committed to conveying the sense of *presence*, or the ‘knowing you are there’ [Newman, 1965]. Metaphysically, the project aimed to make ‘close’ this remote idea [Rothko, 1954] – the idea of *architecture*, made remote by its reproduction.

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Conclusion | The idea of architecture (*continued*).

When an architect looks at a plan or section drawing he or she has the capacity to see ‘space’ within it. An aspect of the architect’s training is this ability to ‘manifest’ an imagination of a complete, built space when surveying the drawing in two dimensions. This is a consequence of the specialised nature of the professional discipline of architecture.

For the client or any other lay persons this is not necessarily the case. With assistance from somebody with an architectural mind, these parties can be shown how architectural conventions such as plan or section relate to the ‘space’ they are desirous of having built. But ordinarily, if they do not have any investment in the project, such drawings are merely codes for the specialised reading of an architect (in design) or a contractor (for construction).

Mark Rothko removed the mediating function of the object – that is, the step ‘in-between’ the object offered up to his viewer and his ‘idea.’ Rothko understood the ability to manifest space in an experiential, imaginative capacity that (as I have noted) is a characteristic of the architect. However, where architecture is a practice of a specialisation or expertise that can be regarded ‘exclusive,’ Rothko sought to instead to be *inclusive*. He sought to share this capacity to experience space in its ‘original’ form. He chased the directness in communication between his viewer and space as a transcendental idea.

Architectural convention is a reproduction of architecture that conveys architecture by means other than itself [Colomina, 1989: 8]. Like all reproduction, convention allows a reception of architecture to a wider and greater audience: this is what makes it ‘conventional.’ But to convey an idea ‘by means other than itself’ implies that the convention is not in itself the idea. This Rothko understood. The elimination of these obstacles between a viewer and the idea became the concept that drove his entire artistic project, which (as *Section I* of this thesis discussed) involved the reduction of rule-based convention to convey an immediate encounter with space.

In this regard the design project becomes an application of the thesis, which in a sense is an echo of Mark Rothko’s thesis. In an abstraction of the architectural convention it offers a direct confrontation with spatiality in Rothko’s sense. This is in the idea that if space cannot be grasped in the ‘there’ of the

contemplated object (the drawing or in his instance, the painting), it can be felt or experienced metaphysically in the 'here' of the space between a viewer and the contemplated object. Where the reproduction fails in its function to allow 'access' to space *within*, then the space *without* occupies the immediate sensory, experiential, and imaginative capacity of the viewer.

This is the appearance of the 'Aura' of the idea of architecture, 'the unique appearance or semblance of a distance, no matter how close the object might be' [Benjamin: Costello, 2005: 172]. The success or failure of the project lies in the invocation of this metaphorical *distance*, despite the tangible closeness of the confronted drawings. There are many strategies of evoking this 'distance,' and within *Section II* of this thesis I have addressed only three: the instable perception of 'Chimera;' the loss of objective knowledge in 'Darkness;' and the relatedness between a de-centring of visuality and 'Authority.'

It is in *Section III* that conclusions as to the scope or significance of the thesis can be drawn. In acknowledging that I cover just three interpretations of the Aura I inherently accept that given the time, *Section II* of the work could grow exponentially outwards to provide a set of interesting and varied findings not covered here. But my expectation also is that *Section III* has arrived at some form of outwardly-reaching 'sense' for the thesis, in what is offered by a study of Mark Rothko to the way architects might think about the relationship between their expertise and their ideas.

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