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PERSONAL STRUCTURES

TIME • SPACE • EXISTENCE

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KOCOT & HATTON

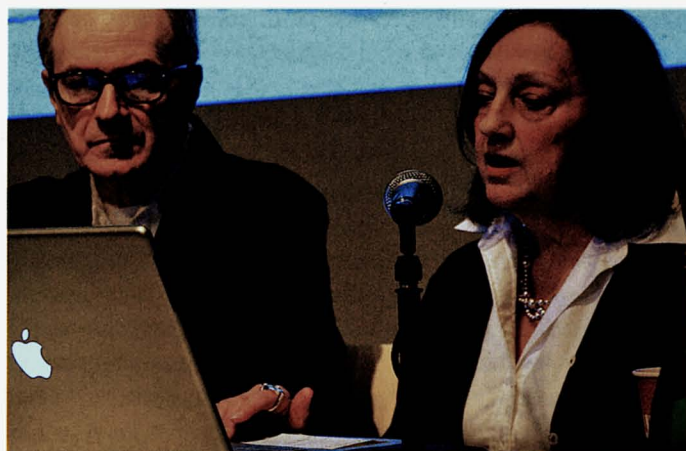
Text as presented during the symposium Space at the New Museum in New York, USA, 4 April 2009

Kocot & Hatton is an artist couple living in Philadelphia. They have been making art about the 'in-between space' for over forty years.

Space. What and where is space? When confronted with the word, we often think of "outer space", the infiniteness of deep space, but in our everyday world, space seems to be defined by enclosure and the degree of closure. How much space are we allotted? What shape is the space? The classic psychology book illustration of a vase versus two silhouettes presents a constantly shifting ambiguous space of figure / ground, black on white, white on black and back again. The mind wants to create a three dimensional space. Space and the void... is the void an empty space? What about the fullness of the void? Is negative space "no space" or just an inversion of space? Perhaps among the best known examples of artists externalizing negative space, turning it into solid objects are: Marcel Duchamp's bronze cast of female genitalia, Female Fig Leaf, Bruce Naumann's A Cast of the Space under my Chair and Rachel Whiteread's House, an enormous cast of the interior space of a row house. What about space and time? Looking up in the night sky we may see dead stars, their light still traveling through space, at the same time the light of some new stars has not yet reached us. Experiencing space. Walking over defined space or defining space with each step. Choreography. What about the inner space, the space of the mind? Thought. How is it measured? We can measure activity in the brain, but thought is more elusive. Space in music is silence; silence can give form to sound. Throughout art history formal organization of space has played a role. Perspectival systems have defined space: aerial, hierarchical, flat, deep perspective and so on.

Our work has navigated through differing aspects of the 'between space'. The between that defines our work exists beyond just mathematics and physics, the between of our collaborative art. Our collaboration, like our work, negotiates both physical & cognitive space.

The between and its place or placement have been fundamental to our collaboration conceptually, procedurally and to the final result. Our work begins with either a concept or inquiry which then dictates the media. If we have an idea for a project that requires using a medium unfamiliar to us, we undertake the challenge to realize the



concept. Perhaps it is natural that with a collaborative team like ours, where division of labor is not an issue, duality and an emphasis on the 'between' occurs. Often there is a straddling of opposites: between thought and form, two dimensional and three dimensional, light and dark, inside and outside, infinite and bounded, public and private, night and dawn, asleep and awake, seen and unseen.

The between has been a part of both the process and subject. 'Betweenness' can be found in our photography, from our early 1970s proposal to install a *Life Size Photograph of the Empire State Building*, for and across from the iconic building; the paradoxical time/space of our *Seventy Mile Per Hour* series inspired by Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* and in our double exposure portraits, combining two perspectives and two moments. Doubling and the between reappears in *Scale/Ratio's* pairs of standing canvases and in prints, paintings and drawings created in the hypnopompic realm, the period between sleep and wakefulness.

Although common to all of us, the hypnopompic state is rarely utilized. For the past ten years we have been creating work in the semi-consciousness preceding waking. This space is not to be confused with Hypnagogic, the period between wakefulness and sleep. Andre Breton described in his first surrealist manifesto as "one evening..." when, just as he was about to fall asleep, he first became aware of the possibilities of automatic writing. Hypnagogic is technically the in-between space of wakefulness and sleep. From our attempts to paint in this space, we have found it is a space much more suited to composing written language and not so accommodating to visual language, but the hypnopompic, that is a different story.

We began the hypnopompic work as a way to extend studio time, but found that working in the dark, in the middle of the night, in the space between sleep and wakefulness also increased our level of collaborative interaction, heightening trust in our senses and sublimating our egos. There is no place for ego in the hypnopompic. The semiconscious state seems to dissolve ego merging it with everything else, as a wave becomes part of the ocean. Immersion in the quiet, interconnected space the work alone came to the forefront.

We had been working with heraldic color codes, the representation of color using graphic patterns—i.e. a series of horizontal lines repre-

sent blue, vertical lines represent red. We realized quickly that the color codes were well suited to not only drypoint but also this unknown state. Drypoints led to drawings, drawings to paintings, paintings to polaroids and on to video. No medium seemed deterred by this unorthodox studio approach. Technically, in that one is neither asleep, nor awake in this in-between state, it is not uncommon to make one's marks, fall back asleep, awake in the morning and have no recollection of participating. Working in total darkness and in the hypnopompic state became an immersion in sensations. Physically it is a feeling of floating or like standing in a rowboat. Everything seems interconnected, constantly moving, a shifting ground. Ink lines met and paint lines joined, like seismographic self-portraits.

We quickly learned several things about hypnopompic space. It is only entered when one awakens of their own accord and sudden noises will instantly jar one out of and into the thoughts of the everyday world. The duration of the hypnopompic does not last long; the moment conscious thinking takes over, it is time to stop working.

Occasionally some truly peculiar moments happen. One time Tom sensed he was making the straightest line he had ever drawn, I rolled over in bed, bumped his elbow and so much for the straight line. In the morning light, the line was remarkably straight. Perception in the hypnopompic is not what one expects outside of it. We have also found the between space of the hypnopompic to be expandable; as the years have gone by we have been able to incrementally extend our working time. Numerous techniques have been used to determine completion. A process to decide finality facilitates when one is working quite literally in the dark. In some instances it would be predetermined by a set number of days or weeks. Specific amounts of paint would also regulate the stop point for a canvas. One hypnopompic variation even included turning on a one thousand watt quartz lamp rather than working in the dark. This moving from sleep to white light and back to sleep produced some good canvases and an intriguing twist on the problem all artists face when entering the studio from a previous days work. Going from the darkness of sleep to the bright white of the studio seemed to eliminate the need to rethink and catch up to the point where one was involved with the process the day before. When the lights go on, the previous session flashes back and one can immediately get back to work.

16 June 2007 we began photographing our digital clock recording the initial moments of our entry into the 'hypnopompic' state. Each night for one year, in the middle of the night, at some indeterminate waking moment, one of us would pick up the camera from the side of the bed and point it at the clock, the only light in the room. After capturing the glowing fluorescent green display, that night's 'photographer' returned to sleep. In some photographs the moment is so precise, the camera captures the change from one minute to the next as numbers float in an undefined space.

The Color of Blue are our most recent paintings utilizing aspects of the hypnopompic. What is it about the color of blue that elicits dramatically different responses among artists? Painter Kasimir Malevich avoided blue for his square Suprematist compositions saying it was limited to sky and water; he spoke triumphantly of blue 'defeated' by white. Though Yves Klein also associated blue with sky

and water, he saw the color as freed by the association, viewing blue as expansive and as the most abstract and living color, "beyond dimensions". Donald Judd stated "Color is very hard to learn, since it is hard to know what is useful. The particulars must be the artist's own." The primary hues, and now blue in particular, have played an integral role in our work. These blue canvases are painted under contrasting conditions, both in the light and consciousness of our 'awake studio' as well as in total darkness, in the middle of the night, in our semi-conscious 'hypnopompic studio'. Previous series have relegated preparation of the grounds to the awake studio. No longer. Now all phases of work slide between the awake and the hypnopompic studios. Some grounds are even prepared in the dark.

These paintings continue our incorporation of medieval 'Heraldic Color Codes', whose simplicity conveys a pulse of hues in graphic form. *The Color of Blue* paintings represent blue via both pattern (the code) and through retinal perception (the pigment), this union amplifying blue's resonance. In some paintings the horizontal code is barely perceptible, in the act of forming, and in others, the code is more obvious. The horizontal paint seems to activate the color in a way similar to the way magnetic fields energize metal filings. The only hue in these paintings is Ultramarine Blue, though the color of blue ranges from inky shadows to a noctilucous, electric blue.

We wanted a picture plane contrasting highly absorbent and reflective light, operating much like Chartres Cathedral's stained glass windows, somber or luminescent, depending upon vantage point. On a sunny day outside the windows are dark and opaque, but once inside, the sun pours through, illuminating the glass, jewel-like colored light fills interior spaces. We hoped to bring both simultaneously, as if straddling between the inside and outside of the cathedral windows, experiencing both at once.

The Andy Warhol Museum commissioned us to create a project. Procedurally, it was an extension of our 35-mm double exposure "conversational portraits" begun in 1985. We began with a triangular set up with the sitter at the apex of the triangle; we would shoot and converse with the sitter while passing the camera back and forth. For this project we used a Polaroid camera instead of a 35 mm. Our use of a Polaroid camera may be a little unorthodox when taking double exposures, however, its use was an homage to Warhol's prolific use of straight Polaroid photography, eliminating any darkroom manipulations. Our portraits capture two moments from two viewpoints on a single frame. Sometimes the sitter's movement is obvious as though the sitter is being transported from one space to another. The literal blurriness is due to the choice of film, exposure, the movement of the sitter and the movement of the photographer.

In 2000 we asked visitors to the Delaware Art Museum's Biennial to volunteer to have their portraits videotaped. They were asked to sit in a darkened room with their eyes closed and to think about the exhibition they had just viewed. Each of the sixty participants was video taped for about one minute. Once all were completed, the infrared video ran in the galleries for the remainder of the exhibition. Portraits of museum visitors thinking about the Biennial could be viewed by current museum visitors surrounded by the same art.

A quiet, dark, empty conference room versus a boisterous reception spilling onto two floors of the museum. How is thinking affected by environment? What does thinking about art look like? The sitters' responses to the session were varied. Some thought it was the most relaxing part of their day and did not want to leave. Others were uneasy about being alone in a darkened room with two strangers. There was an element of trust and lack of trust. Some people fell asleep. One woman even verbalized that she thought we might rifle through her purse. Sleepiness? Relaxing?... Or an uneasiness of being photographed in the dark by strangers. Does this involve their personal space? Perhaps it explains the varied reactions.

In 1999 we were invited by Larry Becker and Heidi Nivling of Larry Becker Contemporary Art, to create a work for the *Fringe Festival*. *Outside/In-between/Inside* was the result. Two 8' high trapezoidal pieces of bubble-wrap served as printing plates to transfer the ink on to the gallery windows. Their shapes came about while experimenting with a variety of origami folds, settling on two that would suggest shutters flung open. The images reverse themselves depending upon which side of the glass you are standing on. From the outside the 'shutters' open in and when standing in the gallery the 'shutters' open out. The prints balance and mediate an interplay between the inside of the gallery and the outside urban landscape, altering both spaces with changing light marking time and space. Throughout both day and night, changing sunlight, reflections, shadows, gallery lights and automobile lights shift the perimeter of spatial inclusion. Shadows of the individual 'bubbles' move across the gallery walls and floor, subtly joining paintings and the environment. A vertical shadow, cast by the wood dividing the two windows, was frozen in time, painted in place. Individual 'bubbles' from the white ink transfer were so dense, a moth came to rest on one of the facets as if it had form. Even the ink color appeared to change, morphing from white to yellow and even to black.

Scale/Ratio: A Work for Two Sites, installed January 1989 addresses how paintings affect context, site and scale and conversely how context, site and scale affect paintings. *Scale/Ratio* was the culmination of our 1985 question of why was it that when a painting is wall hung it is considered to be a painting, but when standing on the floor, or leaning against the wall, at least outside of the studio, it was, in the context of the times, looked at more as sculpture. Unlike Donald Judd's specific objects, the paintings in *Scale/Ratio* are paintings.

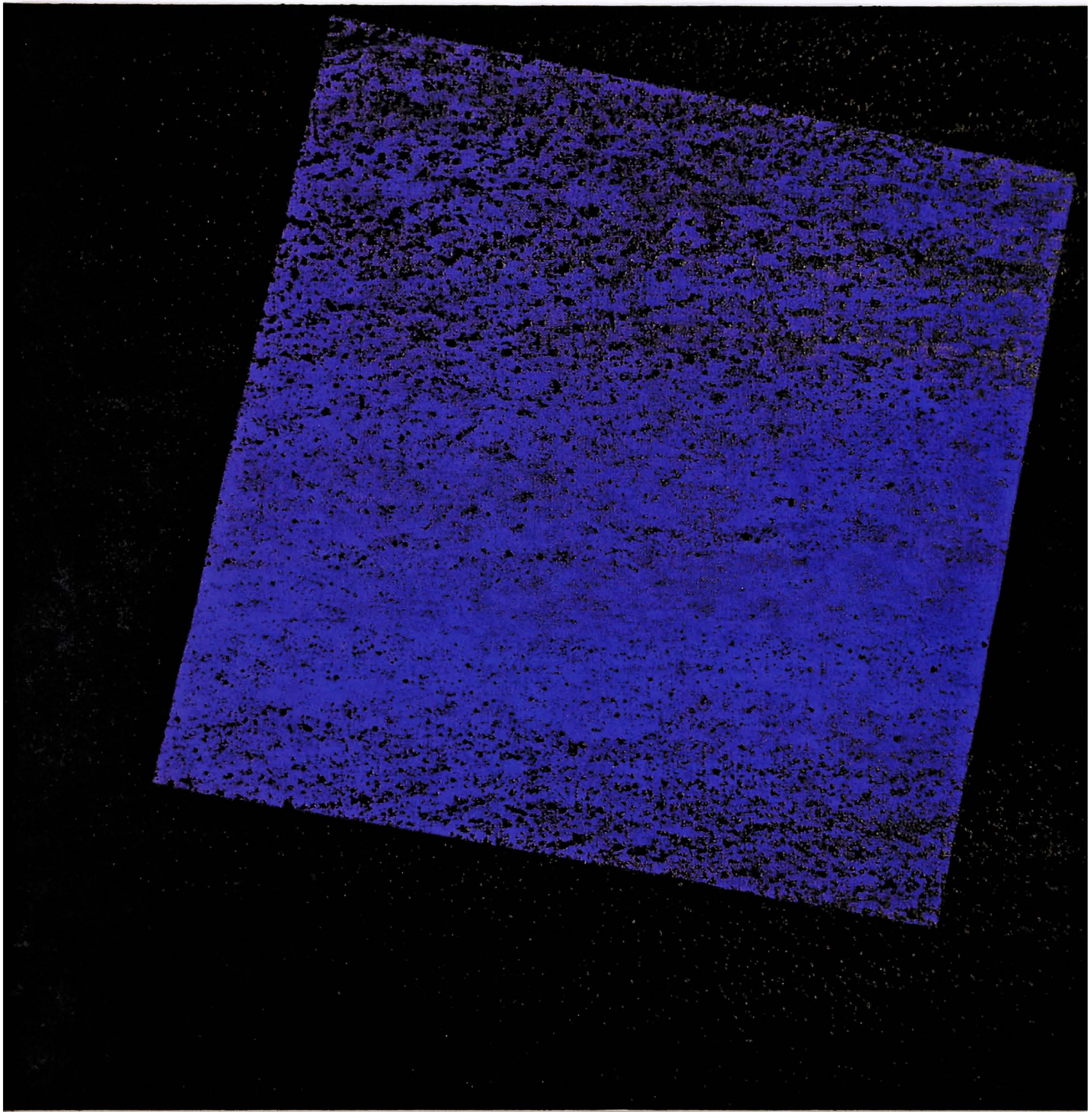
What was it about this reorientation of the canvas in space and the exposure of the back, the skeletal framework that changed it from being viewed as a painting? Why was it being perceived as a sculpture rather than as a painting? Is a painting just a surface, a skin, or does the 'bone structure' play a role? These paintings are intended to be viewed as paintings that happen to be standing in space. The reason they stand away from the wall is so that viewers can approach the picture plane from angles that wall hung paintings simply cannot provide. The reorganization of the viewing space of the painting is what has changed and with it the perception and perspective of the painting.

Our installation for two sites engages Moore College of Art and Design's institutional presence versus the charm of Jessica Berwind Gallery's historic, residential townhouse. As an introduction to the standing paintings, installed in each gallery was a Plan of BiPolar

Dynamics, a slightly altered standard textbook image of the activity of metal filings within a field of magnetic activity, illustrating the geophysical force field between the paintings in their respective sites. At Moore College of Art and Design the yellow and black graphic is painted on a 9' x 20' freestanding wall and in Jessica Berwind Gallery it takes the form of a 4.5' x 10' floor cloth. The paintings themselves are simple graphic images, two stripes, one white and one black with a narrow strip of raw linen down the center separating the pigments. Light coming through the center of the canvas conveys a space behind the surface. The four canvases are three sizes: one large, 11' tall, enveloping, overwhelming, authoritative, two medium, 5.5' tall, an average adult size, and one small, childlike, approximately 2.75' tall. As they stand firmly mirroring each other in pairs, the viewer circles finding their own position.

The project was initially conceived to be primarily about painting's place and physical space. The literal space between each set of the two canvases surfaced as an integral part of the concept of *Scale/Ratio*. Unlike Barnett Newman's ideal viewing distance of the viewer from the canvas, in this case it is the ideal distance between each canvas that allows their relationship to each other to form their 'between space'. To experience this exhibition required carrying the memory of not only the components of half of the exhibition just seen, but of their own physical interaction with it. Once across town, they could compare the two experiences. Visiting both spaces provided full realization of this work.

Ocracoke Island provided not only the right environment for translating Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* into a chant; it was also the setting to make an audio recording of the work. Later, it was performed live in a tiny darkened theater in the city. The acoustics of the contrasting spaces, one expansive and windy, the other confined, narrowly focused and controlled. Differing auditory spatial attributes seem to change perception. The chant made us wonder, "when a body is moving through space, is it actually, or is the body stationary and the environment moving around and past the body, or is it both?" The question began to receive an answer some thirty-five years later while photographing landscapes from an automobile moving at seventy miles per hour. Often it involved calculating future spatial relations further down the road changing with each fraction of a second the speed showing through the elastic stretching of space. Foliage and sky flow together blurring time and space becoming more like thought. Boundaries dissolve creating a dimensionless space. Atoms of matter elongate horizontally and appear as a special form of energy, the photographs reading in two directions at once: right to left (the trajectory of the car) and from left to right (the vanishing landscape as it passes). When preparing our statement for this work, we called on Daniel Marlowe, chair of Princeton University's Physics Department, to confirm or disprove our theory. According to Marlowe, the answer to whether we are moving through space or if the environment flows past us, was something that could only be articulated in mathematical terms, but he said the simple answer is "both are correct." However, there was "one element of the equation" which was "very wrong." Even though we were driving 70 miles per hour, we were actually moving at a speed of 800 miles per hour, factoring in the earth's rotation.



87 Kocot & Hatton, *Untitled*, (*The Color of Blue series, sd15Nov.08, floating square*), 2008, oil paint & oil stick on linen over birch panel, 61x61 cm (24x24").
Courtesy: of Larry Becker Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, USA. Collection of Barbara and Larry Gross, Merion Station, USA.