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In its very structure, *habitus* is mercurial. Spread between two sites, both historical and contemporary in its source material, simultaneously lasting and ephemeral, *habitus* defies a singular definition or description. It is a work of art by an internationally celebrated artist, Ann Hamilton, but it cannot be contained within a discrete art object. It involves the manipulation of space but is not purely architectural or sculptural. It is an installation, but it also involves performance, sound, video, and the exhibition of objects behind glass. It can certainly be described as multimedia, but the project itself extends beyond any of the materials or methods used in its creation. *Habitus* is the space between objects; it is the wanderings within two sites and the sense that they are connected even as a city lies between. In the words of the artist herself,

*Habitus* is the hands from previous generations inhabiting these objects, miniatures, and fragments—evidence of the mutual shaping and possibilities of bodies and materials…*Habitus* is the words found by one reader offered on printed paper to another…the capacity of words to touch at a distance greater than the reach of a hand…*Habitus* is sitting and moving together, absorbed by words, sound, cloth, each other. We cover ourselves. It is a commonness. This is our condition.¹

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I turned off of Arch Street and entered the Fabric Workshop and Museum, snaked through a hallway bustling with people attending the opening of the exhibit, and was presented with a newspaper. This, an employee explained to me, was in lieu of a traditional gallery guide or catalogue, a small companion to habitus full of ruminations and poetic renditions of the project (later, walking through the museum, the paper would slowly grow soft between my fingers). As I walked around the first floor of the museum I felt myself in familiar territory: a few objects were hung on the wall or placed on pedestals accompanied by explanatory text; through a glass door I could see a room that was darkened so that visitors could watch a video that had been installed. The floor was essentially just a small retrospective of Hamilton’s work, full of objects that were now a part of her oeuvre. As I stepped into the section of the exhibition housed a few floors above, however, I had to reevaluate my surroundings. The room was long and high ceilinged, its concrete floor illuminated by the one large window that took up the north-facing wall. Arranged in the center of the room were a series of glass vitrines, with a long wooden shelf jutting out of one wall just at the height of my hip. Stacks of papers were neatly lined up on the shelf, with various folded blankets neatly hung higher up on the wall. My instinct was to slowly promenade around the room as I had on the floor below, calmly regarding each object before moving on to the next. But as I approached the first vitrine it became clear that the objects being displayed were not exclusively creations by Ann Hamilton. Instead I was faced with the pages of a faded book that was filled to the brim with careful, handwritten script. Next to the book was a small box full of spools of thread and miniature scissors, beside the box, a doll. A card in the corner of the vitrine informed me that what appeared to be a journal was in fact a “commonplace book”, that the sewing kit was from Philadelphia and was used centuries before I was born, and that the doll was created for a World’s Fair in 1900. Other vitrines couched books containing small samples of different textiles or carefully arranged ribbons, all surrounded by what seemed to me to be sentences executed in exquisite calligraphy but were surely nothing more than the creator’s everyday handwriting. In some, lines of text wound into globes or books with scratched out text stood as remnants of past projects by Hamilton, indicating her own artistic history. The cases were arranged so that there was no clear beginning or end, no linear path that I could automatically latch onto in order to view every object. Instead, I bounced from case to case at random and followed only what caught my eye, until eventually I turned to the wall of papers. Once again I readied myself to step from stack to stack reading the top sheet, but was taken aback when a visitor reached out towards the shelf and took a page from the top of a pile of papers. Looking around, I saw that others were doing the same, holding a series of pages in one hand or tucking them into purses or pockets. I realized that these were pages from “cloth · a commonplace,” a Tumblr site created by the Fabric Workshop that allowed people from across the city to submit any quotes related to cloth, textiles, or touch that they came across in their own reading. As a result, the pages contained lines from poetry and from scientific textbooks, from Virginia Woolf and academic articles. Some pages contained only a sentence while others were full of text, and some pages contained photographs of books so that the original reader’s annotations were pictured in their own handwriting. Excited by this invitation to touch, I glanced at dozens of pages and removed those that resonated with me, creating a small, unbound book of my own in the process (from book, to table, to handheld collection, the pages would eventually make their way to my wall, gallery-hung artworks in a way they never were in the museum).

I just as easily could have initiated my experience of habitus across the city, stumbling by chance into Municipal Pier 9 instead of seeking out the museum. Separated from the Fabric Workshop
by a short shuttle ride or a long stroll through Philadelphia, Pier 9 sits on the Delaware River. I entered the pier through a brick archway, the peak towering some twenty feet above my head. Spread in front of me was a cavernous warehouse, the air still smelling slightly of sawdust and the walls extending far into the water, which could be seen through large rectangular entryways that pierced the pier at regular intervals. I could not see where the room ended, in part because of the sheer volume of the space, but primarily because towering cylinders of white fabric obstructed my view. Hung from the ceiling using large hoops, these weighty swaths of cloth rustled slightly in the breeze coming in off the water, occasionally billowing out to reveal other visitors standing inside the confines of the material. Caught off guard as the cylinder next to me creaked to life and slowly began to rotate, I realized that by pulling thick ropes scattered throughout the room you could urge the cloth into motion. A smile broke across my face as I saw that once again I was being invited to touch, to wrap myself in the smooth fabric or brush a series of cylinders with extended arms as I wove throughout the sea of cloth. A pair of young children shrieked as they ran in and out of the columns, and an older couple shared an ice cream cone on a nearby bench, visibly tickled by the scene in front of them. It seemed that just as many people were here simply to sit and enjoy the space as to view the work of an important artist. Eventually tearing myself away from the cylinders, I made my way further back into the room and further out onto the water. Here I could sit on one of many benches watch a film that was being projected onto the side of a large metal container. Navigating the thick ridges of the container’s surface, the film closely followed a string of text that turned out to be a poem about rivers by Susan Stewart. I was engrossed for a while, trying to make some sense out of the letters and construct a coherent sentence in my mind, but the text was shot so tightly that it was difficult to remember what words had come before. A few feet away from the film sat a woman bent over a desk, a lamp casting a spotlight on the task that was occupying her attention. Between her hands was a knit sweater, which she appeared to be methodically ripping apart. Stitch by stitch a hole in the back of the sweater grew, but the woman held a neutral expression and never looked up to acknowledge the groupings of visitors that would occasionally form around her. Further back into the room but in line with the woman at the desk, another woman sat on a four-legged stool. Clouds of cream colored wool made a miniature mountain range by her side, and at her feet were tightly wound balls of yarn. Like the other woman she did not look up, but instead stared intently at the spindle bobbing up and down in front of her. Once, she dropped the spindle. I was surprised by the clatter that broke the relative silence surrounding her, but she calmly descended from her perch and resumed her task. The rest of the room was screened off by a mesh wall, through which I could see what seemed to be debris from the pier’s past life. Containers and pieces of wood as well as more unidentifiable materials lay strewn across the floor or piled at random, all the more difficult to discern as they were cast in increasing shadow. I had come to the pier in the evening, and gradually less and less light filtered in from the walls’ openings. Lamps highlighted the two attendants and hidden spotlights lit up each cylinder of fabric, but eventually the pier had to be navigated as if underwater. As I stood at the far end of the room and attempted to apprehend the installation in its entirety, I found myself unable to focus on any one object or any one person. Instead, I departed with a sense of the entire room pulsing quietly, expanding and contracting in uneven but calm breaths.
Hamilton often describes her artistic endeavors as a part of an associative practice: she brings seemingly disparate objects and ideas into association and finds meaning in the subtle links between them. It is appropriate, then, that in the creation of *habitus* she would be drawn to another associative practice, that of creating commonplace books. At the most basic level, commonplaces are books of quotations that have been catalogued under various headings.² For instance, as I am reading I might be struck by a particular line or passage, which I can then copy into a notebook alongside other passages or occasional thoughts of my own. A commonplace can be used as a method of remembering, of compiling source material to be used in one’s own writing, or even as a way to practice penmanship. Robert Darnton, a history professor and librarian writing on early modern reading practices, argues that by turning readers into writers commonplaces can be sites of self-making, a method of recognizing oneself as an autonomous individual, and of making sense of the world. As he writes, “by selecting and arranging snippets from a limitless stock of literature, early modern Englishmen gave free play to a semi-conscious process of ordering experience. The elective affinities that bound their selections into patterns reveal an epistemology—a process of knowing—at work below the surface.”³ These collections put diverse texts into conversation, often allowing unexpected significance to be found in the associations between texts.

The practice of commonplacing, besides drawing a thread between different texts and between private and public life, also strings together different time periods. It is estimated that commonplace books first came into being around the twelfth century, and while they reached a peak in popularity in late Renaissance England they continue to be created by readers and writers

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today. Both the historical and the contemporary commonplace take up residence in *habitus*. On the one hand are the commonplaces created throughout Philadelphia’s past that were pulled out of the archives of local institutions to be exhibited at the Fabric Workshop. Also present is the shelf of papers compiled and dispersed by visitors to the Fabric Workshop, a sort of communal commonplace that has been torn out of the binding of a book. Both manifestations of commonplacing represent Hamilton’s method of creation made concrete, a small example of her larger practice of bringing different sources into relation.

Associative thinking is not only suited to the creation of artworks—Walter Benjamin has demonstrated its value in academic practice as well. His famously incomplete magnum opus *The Arcades Project* (otherwise known as *Passagenwerk*) was essentially a commonplace book, even if he never acknowledged it as such. Although seemingly created with the hope that it would eventually become an academic book about Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, and specifically about the waning presence of arcades, Benjamin died before the text could come close to being finished. As a result, the project now takes the form of hundreds of pages of categorized quotations and notes that were compiled from the reams of notecards Benjamin produced over years of research. Despite the fact that we cannot know how Benjamin envisioned the final product, the material we do have indicates that Benjamin engaged in an associative practice much like the one fostered by Hamilton, structuring his thought through the bringing together of a diverse array of texts. In an endearingly humanizing moment in a letter to his friend Gershom Scholem (as quoted by Benjamin scholar Susan Buck-Morss in her book on *The Arcades Project*), Benjamin described his project as “howling like some small beastie in my

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nights whenever I haven’t let it drink from the most remote sources during the day,” a sign of his desire to reach towards far-flung sources in the compilation of his research.5

This act of crafting a (sometimes impossibly large) web of quotes and notations lends itself well not just to Benjamin’s thought process, but also to his more general approach to history. Benjamin resisted the idea that history is a coherent chain of events, or that it is confined to the past. Rather than recounting history as a series of causes with clearly identifiable consequences and “telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary,” Benjamin wanted a historian who “grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.”6 History is a web, not a line, with people and events effecting, upending, and connecting with one another in a complex constellation of relationships that reach across space and time. Benjamin wrote of the experience of the past being apprehended as “an image which flashes up,” coming into contact with the present at unexpected moments.7 A hitherto unnoticed event in the past can suddenly find newfound significance in the present—perhaps a style of clothing that was once commonplace can be recreated decades later as a radical statement, for instance—the historical moment or idea getting “blasted out of the continuum of history” as a result.8

Perhaps because he distrusted dominant narratives or because he believed that any historical detail could become newly relevant, the topics that Benjamin focused on were wide-ranging and often apparently minor. Within The Arcades Project Benjamin collects information on everything from fashion to photography, from advertising to Marxist theories of progress, from dolls to prostitution. He was fascinated by outdated technologies and economies like those

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7 Ibid., 255.
8 Ibid., 261.
of the panorama and the arcade (similarly, we will see that habitus resides in a space abandoned due to the decline of the marine port’s importance in the economy, and that it harbors technologies like that of the treadle bicycle which was obsolete almost as soon as it was created). But Benjamin’s attention to the fragmentary and the outmoded goes beyond personal interest. In the words of the translators of The Arcades Project (at moments quoting Benjamin), he was invested in “the ‘refuse’ and ‘detritus’ of history, the half-concealed variegated traces of the daily life of ‘the collective’” because of the way in which these otherwise unnoticed details disrupt our typical understanding of history.9 As a critical theorist, he well was aware that the victors construct the narrative of history. Focusing on odd tidbits and scraps of material rather than retelling grand events allowed him to push back on the dominant understanding of the past. For this reason, as Buck-Morss explains, he focused on objects that “discarded and forgotten… lie buried within surviving culture, remaining invisible precisely because [they were] of so little use to those in power.”10 It was significant that he focused not just on retelling or forming ideas, but also on otherwise unnoticed physical materials, objects, and techniques. A historical materialist at heart (albeit one who spent significant energy critiquing historical materialism), Benjamin paid as close attention to film, photography, hats, clothes, plush cushions, and curtains as he did to philosophical concepts. As Buck-Morss points out, the objects he brought together “as ‘a world of secret affinities’ were the philosophical ideas, as a constellation of concrete, historical referents.”11

Although I recognize the irony of attempting to emulate a project that became so far-reaching that it ultimately could not be completed, I find The Arcades Project and Benjamin’s

10 Buck-Morss, Dialectic of Seeing, x.
11 Ibid., 4.
work more generally to be a generative framework for approaching *habitus*. Looking to Hamilton and Benjamin as two thinkers committed to crafting constellations of associations, I have similarly approached *habitus* with the goal of creating a commonplace of sorts. Rather than create a smoothed out, linear argument (presented like beads on a rosary), I have structured this thesis as a series of fragments, intentionally placed in order to prompt contrasts or resonances between each section. I make liberal use of direct quotations not to avoid analysis, but to allow the voices of different theorists to come together as they might in a commonplace and to foreground the echoing of similar words throughout the work of varied thinkers. I have written short histories of objects that are not meant to be definitive so much as suggestive, illuminating the past lives of the materials that made up *habitus* that would almost certainly have gone unnoticed by visitors. I am not attempting to create an exhaustive theorization of *habitus*, but I am instead aiming to deepen the web of associations already created by Hamilton and to situate the project within an even wider network of theoretical affinities. Collecting material both from *habitus* itself (marked in green) and from my own reading of theoretical texts (marked in blue), I bring these sources into conversation and, in creating a commonplace, craft a new context for *habitus*.

I do hope that some meaning will arise out of these constructed relationships between descriptive and theoretical fragments. Ultimately, I will argue that through rhythm, tactility, and the promotion of hyper attention, *habitus* creates a contemporary auratic experience that allows for an empathetic interaction between bodies, objects, and histories. These terms may not hold much meaning right now, but they will gain significance as we go along. And even if they do not, it is my hope that if nothing else this commonplace will allow a version of *habitus* to be grappled with and felt on a small scale.
II
ANN HAMILTON

Whether in the remnants from previous projects displayed in vitrines or in the reproduction of familiar themes, habitus bears many echoes of Hamilton’s prior work. Although it has a different form than many of her past projects, in many ways habitus continues to explore questions that Hamilton has brought throughout her career (for examples of related works, see the Appendix).

Born and raised in Ohio, Hamilton received her BFA from the University of Kansas in 1979 and her MFA from Yale University in 1985. Her training was in textile design and sculpture, and both fabric and the manipulation of three-dimensional spaces can be found to a greater or lesser degree in almost all of her projects. Indeed, her artworks often defy categorization by medium or discipline, and she frequently incorporates installation, performance, film, sound, and writing into a single project.

Despite the broad range of her materials, a few common themes do thread their way through Hamilton’s work. For instance, Hamilton’s best-known works are sensorially rich installation environments. Projects like tropos (1993) utilize highly textured materials, sounds, and smells to make visitors conscious of their own bodies in the installation space. Interested in the exploration and creation of embodied knowledge, these installations encourage viewers to come to an understanding of the piece through methods beyond visual apprehension. Hamilton also pays careful attention to the histories of the sites in which these installations are located, aware of the past that lingers in a space even when visitors may not notice its ghosts. Another common element in many of Hamilton’s projects is the presence of attendants. In these projects hired individuals are constantly present in the space, often quietly completing a task with intense concentration. In any given project attendants may be winding typewriter ink around their hands (mattering, 1997-8), peeling text out of a book and winding the paper into balls (lineament, 1994), simultaneously reading and burning lines of text (tropos, 1993), or singing to pigeons (the event of the thread, 2012-13). As these examples may suggest, the alteration of books crops up in a number of Hamilton’s projects, as does a broader interest in the physical experience of reading and the relationship between text and textile (for more on these themes, see the further reading list).

An intellectually and materially curious artist, Hamilton’s projects are rich with literary, poetic, scientific, and philosophical references. She is, ultimately, concerned with exploring the intricacies of human experience, and her projects create spaces for visitors to investigate their own habits as well as the material landscapes surrounding them.
The “habitus” is what Bourdieu calls the system through which social categories are reproduced. Both a “structured structure” and a “structuring structure,” habitus is determined by our position in society and in turn shapes our perception of and approach to the world.\textsuperscript{12}

“The product of the internalization of the structure of social space,”\textsuperscript{13} habitus is “the embodied mark of a collective history and an individual history which imposes on all agents…its system of imperative presuppositions.”\textsuperscript{14} It is important to note here that an individual’s taking up of social structure is not purely, or even primarily cognitive—habitus is ingrained in the body, and is often manifested through unconscious physical habits. In \textit{Masculine Domination} Bourdieu depicts one of these subtle habits by describing a woman crossing the room and unconsciously pulling down the skirt that simultaneously must be short and cannot expose too much.\textsuperscript{15} In this way, habitus stands at the intersection between self and society, between inner and outer worlds.

\textbf{II.}

In Latin, the word \textit{habitus} has a few different forms. On the one hand, it is the perfect passive participle of the verb \textit{habere}, meaning “to have” or “to hold” (or, more poetically “to consider,” in the sense of holding something in the mind). As a noun, \textit{habitus} can mean “condition,” as in a person or thing’s state of being, or “garment.” It is this final meaning of the word that was likely taken up in the religious context. There, the word “habit” refers to a loose religious garment. Like the concept habitus, a habit exists between a body and the world, enveloping the wearer in cloth as well as social categorizations.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Bourdieu, \textit{Masculine Domination}, 55.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, 29
\end{itemize}
“By drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs partitions that enable one to partake in communal space... configurations of what can be seen and thought, forms of inhabiting the material world.”

“New social relationships...call for a new space.”

Space appears to be a concept so broad that it is hardly worth defining. Yet it is this amorphous concept that Henri Lefebvre set out to grapple with in *The Production of Space*. While it could be argued that he did little to actually constrain or clarify the concept of space, his philosophical investigation did help to provide categories to structure a discussion of space in its many forms.

Perhaps the most significant assertion made by Lefebvre is that space is not simply a neutral setting for events or interactions. It never exists outside of ideology, and in fact does not preexist the social relations, tensions, moods, histories, ideas, symbols, bodies, and objects that may inhabit it. Rather, space can be thought of as co-arising with those moods, histories, and bodies. As Derek McCormack (a geographer highly influenced by Lefebvre) points out, events may be influenced by site, but site does not exist prior to moving bodies.

Put more succinctly in the words of Lefebvre himself, “*(social) space is a (social) product.*”

In order to more clearly understand what is talked about when we talk about space, Lefebvre outlines certain categories that can be used to classify types of spaces. Early on in the book, Lefebvre states that we can think about physical, mental, and social spaces. Later, he newly articulates these categories as lived, conceived, and perceived spaces. But the terms that he delves deepest into (that are closely associated with the prior triads of terms) are spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces.

**I. Spatial practice**

Spatial practices encompass the movement of physical bodies that produce particular sites. They include the performance of individual relations to social space. In other words, an individual enacting their position within society would be engaging in spatial practice. As Lefebvre writes, “the spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it.” Spatial practice denotes the space that is produced through everyday, bodied experience.

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21. If one is interested in Hegelian and Marxist intellectual histories it is notable that Lefebvre was experimenting with tripartite dialectical thinking in order to try to maintain all of the tension and nuance of a dialectic without requiring only binary categories, which is why all of the following categorizations tend to be triads.
II. Representations of Space

Representations of space are the signs (usually verbal) that are used to represent or articulate space. For instance, we might think of city planning or scientific disciplines—they are often less concerned with lived and perceived space so much as conceived (or mental) space. Representations can in turn impact the production of space. As Lefebvre explains, “they intervene in and modify spatial textures which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology.”

III. Representational Spaces

Representational space “overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.” It encapsulates both the coded meanings associated with physical objects and also the artworks, works of literature, and philosophical writings that attempt to describe space as it is perceived.

To be clear, these are not three clearly distinct types of space that we might find in separate places or times. Instead, they exist in a complex dialectical relationship, often bleeding into and layering on top of one another. habitus involves spatial practice in terms of the embodied experience of the project, and it is a representational space in terms of the symbolic weight its various components hold. Lefebvre’s work also highlights the fact that there was not some neutral space into which habitus was dropped, and the space of habitus does not just sit waiting to visitors to arrive. Rather, the space of habitus is produced through the interactions of bodies, objects, and signs. It is perhaps easier to accept that the space of habitus is produced because it is a conspicuously crafted environment, but it is also continuously being reproduced in new ways as it is inhabited.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 42.
28 Ibid., 39.


MUNICIPAL PIER 9

William Penn chose Philadelphia’s location in part because its position between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers gave the city potential to become a major port. Even as the city was in its infancy there was a hope that it would develop into a major point of transition, allowing people and commodities to mix together on their way to and from far off cities. It is not surprising, then, that piers (those spaces where ships, trucks, and trains can converge and exchange goods) would play a significant role in the city’s history.

Indirectly at least, the city’s early piers were fed and fortified by Quakerism. Quaker merchants in Philadelphia maintained social and religious ties to Quakers in other cities, and by the 1700’s the city was a major port—until the War of 1812 Philadelphia’s ports harbored the highest volume of trade in the nation. During this period piers witnessed the export of grain, meat, lumber, iron, skins, and furs, as well as the import of rum, molasses, wool cloth, and slaves. Despite the fact that Quakers eventually condemned slavery, and that Pier 9 was built after slavery was formally abolished, the land on which Pier 9 now stands was at one point almost certainly a site at which enslaved peoples were unloaded as cargo bound to enter into a lucrative slave trade as commodities.

Municipal Pier 9 itself, however, was built in a different national context. At the turn of the century shipping technologies were improving: more efficient engines allowed larger ships to carry more cargo and more passengers, so there was a push to create larger piers as well. The onset of World War I only added to this pressure to expand ports. As a result, in 1916 plans were put in place to transform a small wooden pier owned by Lehigh Railroad Company into a newly renovated port. Supply shortages from the war caused building progress to be slow, but by 1919 Municipal Pier 9 as it appears today was completed, the first instance of what was to become a moment of major pier expansion. As Cloantha Wade, a scholar of Philadelphia’s Municipal Piers narrates,

In 1921, the United Fruit Company moved to Pier 9…The fruit company's ships full of bananas arrived weekly from Jamaica. At the pier, crews unloaded the fruit into the pier for distribution by truck and train. Banana handling was a labor intensive job, available to lower skilled workers known as ‘banana fiends.’ Because banana handling was one of the few port jobs which offered daily, rather than weekly pay, it appealed to those who had immediate need for cash.

After this moment of fast-paced exchange, the pier was primarily used as a storage space for the city until the arrival of habitus. However, at its peak Pier 9 was a bustling site in which people and goods with origins scattered across the globe could come into relation.

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30 Ibid., 8.
31 Ibid., 12.
32 Ibid., 9.
33 Ibid., 44.
34 Ibid., 47.
36 Ibid.
RELATIONALITY

Scholars such as Derek McCormack, Erin Manning, Giuliana Bruno, and Teresa Brennan, despite writing across a range of disciplines, share the conviction that meaning and emotion arise through relation. Teresa Brennan presents the most straightforward example of relationality in stating that, “we are not self-contained in terms of our energies.”37 Throughout her book she carefully shows the ways in which emotions are not contained within each individual but can circulate in spaces and amongst groups. Feeling, she asserts, arises through the relations between people.

Erin Manning takes this view a step farther by arguing that the relations shaping our everyday experience arise not just between people, but also amongst people and objects. Using the example of someone approaching a chair she writes, “what is prehended is not the chair per se but the relation between body and chair, between movement and concept.”38 When we are confronted with a chair, the chair-as-object is just one aspect of what we apprehend. More than just the physical object, we anticipate our relation to it by understanding its intended use. The meaning of the chair, as useful object, as symbol, as significant possession, does not reside in the physical matter of the chair itself, but its relation to us and the other objects around it.

This meaning that is in excess of any individual object is what Derek McCormack is gesturing towards when he claims that relations are more than their involved components. He also argues that, rather than being static, relations are constantly in flux and reside on the “chromatic fringes” between the actual and the virtual.39 They are continually arising, transforming, and falling away in the midst of people, objects, environments, and landscapes. These relations may not be visible, but the meanings and emotions they bring with them have real, tangible effects.

As soon as I enter either of habitus’ sites, I come into a network of relations so numerous and complex it is almost impossible to map. When I pocket a piece of paper from the deconstructed commonplace I come into relation with the author who wrote the text that is on the sheet, with the person who submitted the quote to habitus, with the FWM employee who printed the commonplace, with the sheet of paper itself and all of its physical qualities, and with whoever might read the paper once I have carried it out of the museum. When I stand in front of a vitrine I come into relation with all of the objects couched on the bottom of the display case and all of the history worn on the objects’ surfaces. At the same time, I am in relation with the other bodies milling about in the room, with the smooth concrete floor and the high ceiling, with the history of the museum and with the bright windows. When I step into Pier 9, I come into relation with the swaths of fabric and the two attendants, with the debris piled in the back of the warehouse and the river outside. When I pulled a rope and discovered that a stranger was standing inside of the fabric that I was moving, I came into relation with them too, if only for a moment.

39 McCormack, Refrains, 35.
“Held by cloth’s hand, we are swaddled at birth, covered in sleep, and wound in death. A single thread spins a myth of origin and a tale of adventure, interweaves people and webs of communication. Coat and tent are the first portable architecture for the body, a flag carries the symbol of nationality, a folded blanket is a story of trade. Like weather, however changeable, cloth envelops experience.”

1. “cloth, typically produced by weaving or knitting textile fibers.”

2. “the walls, floor, and the roof of a building… the essential structure of anything, especially a society or culture.”

Travelling through ancient Rome’s mason yards from the laborers (facer, craftsman) into the objects they produced (fabrica, metal craft/construction/building), fabric stopped briefly in France under the pseudonym fabrique before settling down into a network of English meanings in the fifteenth century. “The word originally denoted a building, later a machine or appliance, the general sense of being ‘something made’” Beyond the associations with texture and tactility brought about by the material experience of fabrics, fabric already holds within it a connection to architectural space and to social relations.

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TOUCH

After a few minutes at either site of habitus visitors quickly get over their hesitation at the prospect of touching art, but this invitation to touch is far from the norm. In fact, touch as a mode of experiencing the world has consistently been undervalued for the sake of vision. In Downcast Eyes, Martin Jay carefully chronicles the fact that throughout the history of Western philosophy vision has held a privileged position as a method of gaining knowledge and as the primary analogy for the process of truth-acquisition. Although he does not see full-fledged ocularcentrism come into being until the modern period, he argues that vision has consistently been held above the other senses as a viable mode of apprehending the world. This emphasis on the viewing subject is not restricted to the realm of philosophy—the history of art and architecture has its share of ocularcentrism as well. Juhani Pallasmaa points out that the vast majority of architecture is designed for a viewing subject (and the same can be said of painting and other art forms as well), with the other senses mostly ignored.

It is a shame that touch has tended to be left out Western intellectual history because, as many more contemporary theorists have pointed out, it is a fertile and valuable sensation. Unlike vision, touch brings people and objects close. It makes literal connections and points of contact—it “is the sense of nearness, intimacy, and affection…touch approaches and caresses.”

The way in which touch necessitates mutual contact proves conceptually fruitful as well. As Eve Sedgwick writes, “even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity.” In its inability to maintain distance touch can be messy, but that mess can also lead to nuance.

46 Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin, 29.
47 Ibid., 50.
48 Sedgwick, Touching Feeling, 14.
The dolls displayed in the vitrines at the Fabric Workshop and Museum are not meant to be played with. Lying behind glass, they cannot be cradled or touched. As intimate as the journals and as cloaked in fabric as the swatch books next to them, the dolls receive the visitors’ gazes with blank faces.

Taken in the abstract, beyond whatever personal significance or memories a particular doll may hold, dolls have become rich symbols. On the one hand, a doll may represent childhood, play, care, nurture (real or imagined), domesticity, femininity, or girlishness. At the same time, dolls have also come to indicate vacancy or emotionlessness. In his section on dolls in the Arcades Project, Benjamin wrote: “at a certain point in time, the motif of the doll acquires a sociocritical significance. For example: ‘you have no idea how repulsive these automatons and dolls can become, and how one breathes at last on encountering a full-blooded being in this society.”

One doll catches my attention for what I read as the slightly startled look on her face. Most of the dolls’ porcelain faces are molded into carefully neutralized expressions, but something about the slope of this doll’s eyebrows makes me feel as if she is worried. I am struck by how eerily realistic her glass eyes are, and I attempt to hold her vacant gaze. Her face is covered with black paint that gives the otherwise matte bisque porcelain a soft shine, and bright pink lips stand out starkly. Her arms and legs, stitched from kid leather, are also covered in black paint, although the off-white leather shows through at her elbows and wrists where the paint has worn away from the bendable joints. Otherwise she is completely cloaked in a delicate pink dress. Made of cream-colored lace stitched together with cotton containing thin blue and pink stripes, the dress wraps her shoulders and puffs out around her hips in a manner that indicates I should not imagine her living in the contemporary moment.

This particular doll is attempting to represent a social type, and in so doing stands in not just for domesticity, but also for a particularly racist brand of anthropology and nationalism. Created between 1870 and 1886 in France by the doll manufacturer Jumeau, this doll was made for the 1900 Paris Exposition. Recorded by the Philadelphia Museum of Art as a “Martinique female doll,” it would have been displayed in order to represent the inhabitants of the Caribbean French colony. As was the case at many expositions and World’s Fairs, both objects and living people were put on display in an attempt to educate the American and European public about social “types.” It was thought that by viewing a doll made to look like a general image of a Martinique woman (as if such an image existed), a viewer could come to understand something about the people of Martinique as a whole.

49 Benjamin, Arcades Project, 694.
51 Ibid.
As Ann Hamilton wrote in the newspaper that served as a gallery guide for *habitus*, “a model of a person—the doll, often a toy for children, elicits and receives though does not reciprocate touch or emotion. This female doll, perhaps the plaything for an adult woman, was not made to be touched but was made for display, to demonstrate a cultural type among other cultural types.”

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The presence of a doll allows visitors to anticipate touch or affection, but its placement behind glass as well as the intended use of this particular doll complicate viewers’ desire for shared emotion.

52 Hamilton, “everyone.”
Teresa Brennan defines affect as “the physiological shift accompanying a judgment.” She distinguishes affect from feeling, saying that affect is more like the experience of feeling a feeling—it is not just a response to stimuli, but an awareness of a physical shift accompanying that response. If you perceive a dangerous situation the complex set of responses like an elevated heart rate, rapid breathing, or worried thoughts might make up a fearful affect. However, Brennan does acknowledge that while in her own academic work she wants to maintain precision in her definition of affect, it is not incorrect to more simply use affect as a synonym for emotion.

What is important to keep in mind when using the term affect is that “while its wellsprings are social, the transmission of affect is deeply physical in its effects.” Affect is also typically used to indicate something more than just a personal feeling of anger or elation. It is more specifically thought of as an emotion taken on through a social setting and manifested in the body. This is why it is common to hear terms like “affective atmosphere” or “affective spaces” that imply a general mood or shared emotion—affect can be passed from person to person and can circulate throughout a space, even as the cognitive apprehension of that affect and its physical effects and are experienced individually.

53 Brennan, Transmission of Affect, 5.
54 Ibid., 23.
What does it mean for affect to circulate through a space that is itself produced by the relations between bodies and objects? It is not a phenomenon one can see, so is it really happening? Perhaps the most straightforward indication that the circulation of affect is a real and sensible phenomenon is the experience of walking into a room and immediately being aware of its mood. Imagine arriving at a party and feeling the elation shared by the guests, or entering a dining room only to become immediately aware of a palpable tension in the air. Moments like these are examples of the presence of what theorists have come to call “affective atmospheres.”

The idea of affective atmosphere arises in a wide range of disciplines, but it manages to carry a similar meaning in each of its many contexts. For instance, geographer Derek McCormack writes that, “bodies participate in the generation of affective spaces: spaces whose qualities and consistencies are vague but sensed, albeit barely, as a distinctive affective…atmosphere.”

Visual studies professor Giuliana Bruno similarly articulates the production of affective space: “places and affects are produced jointly…affects not only are makers of space but are themselves configured as space, and they have the actual texture of atmosphere.” What’s more, she argues that the experience of feeling an emotion is actually the reception of an atmospheric shift. This connection between atmosphere and felt emotion recalls the work of Teresa Brennan. A theorist of affect, she writes that “the ‘atmosphere’ or environment literally gets into the individual” when describing the individual’s susceptibility to shared emotion. Looking more specifically towards the experience of an artwork, architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa echoes these sentiments when he says, “I lend my emotions and associations to the space and the space lends me its atmosphere, which entices and emancipates

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55 McCormack, Reifrains, 3.
56 Bruno, Surfice, 19.
57 Brennan, Tranmission of Affect, 1.
my perceptions and thoughts.” In each instance, atmosphere is discussed as a real but vague presence, one that is closely tied to both space and affect (seemingly both producing and produced by space and emotion). However, beyond a shared use of the terms affect and atmosphere, these theorists often do not go into much detail about how affective atmospheres are produced, or what sorts of experiences atmospheres actually bring about.

Perhaps surprisingly, a somewhat more nuanced account of atmosphere surfaces in the work of Walter Benjamin, an author who wrote decades before Brennan, Pallasmaa, Bruno, and McCormack. Although he uses the term aura rather than affective atmosphere, Benjamin is similarly concerned with affective spaces and particularly those produced by works of art. It is worth grappling with his use of the term aura throughout his writing (despite his ideas being notoriously contradictory and difficult to pin down), because it provides us with a more qualitative understanding of what it is like to experience atmosphere and goes into somewhat more depth regarding what aura being present in the contemporary city might implicate.

Most people familiar with Benjamin’s work associate the term aura with his famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (the “Artwork essay”). In this essay, aura is that which encapsulates the uniqueness and authenticity of an art object. The awe one might feel in front of a famous painting is in part the result of the awareness that this is the original and only copy of the painting, that the hands of the artist have touched the canvas before you. The awareness of this history, the force with which the authenticity of the art object asserts itself, is aura. For something like film, however, there is no unique original to harken back to and thus the haze of authenticity is lost.

Benjamin simultaneously defines aura in spatial terms. Aura, he asserts, is “the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be.” Regardless of how close one may be allowed to stand to a painting in a gallery, there is a sense of infinite distance between the viewer and the canvas. Regarding both the art object’s authenticity and its apparent distance, Benjamin’s Artwork essay celebrates the loss of aura. Now, he reasons, art will have the opportunity to be more available to the masses and to take on a more political role in daily life.

Yet when read in conjunction with his other writings, Benjamin’s celebration of aura’s demise seems somewhat surprising. A number of authors point out that in letters to his friend and Kabbalist thinker Gershom Scholem, and in his writings that are inflected by his general interest in more mystical texts, Benjamin does seem to appreciate aura. So why condemn it so strongly in the Artwork essay? For one thing, Hansen suggests that Benjamin had to criticize aura and situate it within a strictly secular aesthetic context in order for the term to be gain traction in academic circles. I would also argue that the Artwork essay is in fact more critical of aura’s appropriation by hegemonic institutions than it is critical of the idea of aura in general. After all, Benjamin has a very particular reason for celebrating the withering of the aura under modern conditions—he appreciates the fact that “mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.” He argues that the art object’s aura is tied up in its ritualistic heritage, that the awe one feels in front of an original painting is in some ways a

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60 Ibid., 222.

61 In a large part, it is this sense of distance created by works of high art that indicates their cultural importance. It is interesting, then, to take a moment to notice what objects create distance in habitus. For the most part, all of the materials in the exhibit clearly invite visitors to break the barrier between themselves and the art, to reach out and touch the cloth, rope, and paper in front of them. However, in the portion of the exhibit that resided at the Fabric Workshop and Museum there were a number of objects displayed in glass vitrines: dolls, old commonplace books, diaries, and swaths of fabric. It was domestic, everyday objects that were presented using a traditional museum display technique, rather than objects more typically seen as works of art. Hamilton elevated the cultural status of these objects by distancing them from the viewer and putting them behind glass, making it clear that the everyday is central to her work as an artist and the project of habitus as a whole.


descendent of the awe one might feel in front of an intricately decorated idol tucked away in the recesses of a church. What worries Benjamin is less the absorbing power of aura so much as the placement of this compelling force within traditional structures like churches or art institutions. If there were a somewhat altered understanding of aura (and we will see shortly that there is), one free of these authoritative associations, Benjamin might not be so opposed to the concept after all.

Indeed, a number of authors have picked up on the potential for the redemption of aura within Benjamin’s thought. Alan Latham, for instance, writes that, “Benjamin sought to engender the rediscovery and release of utopian traces which lay dormant within material objects, blasting away the fetishism and reifications that were embedded within them”64—aura must be rid of its problematic associations, but it has positive possibilities. Michael Taussig, too, feels that Benjamin’s critique of aura could be read as paving the way for the redemption of the concept in a new context, and he describes aura’s withering in the modern age as in fact “a process of demystification and reenchantment.”65 Perhaps most significantly, Jurgen Habermas asserted that there was not just political potential in the mechanically reproduced and aura-free art object, but in fact within auratic experiences themselves. He writes, “redemptive politics…must somehow try to recover and/or reengineer auratic experience within the frame of a liberational politics…this decline creates the possibility for a reengendering of the auratic within a different, more emancipated constellation.”66 Like Taussig and Latham, Habermas sees the potential for aura to be used in a much more hopeful, even idealistic manner, rather than only as an oppressive and outmoded quality of traditional art objects.

The version of aura that these later authors find so appealing is in fact a much older understanding of aura than that which appears in the Artwork essay. It is a more mystical idea, one that points to an experience that is collective and sensorially rich (rather than individual and cerebral). For instance, the popular translation of the Artwork essay that appears in Illuminations includes a line that reads, “you experience the aura of those mountains.” Hansen, however, says that a more accurate translation of the German would say that one breathes the aura of those mountains. This subtle change of wording is in fact quite significant—now aura is not just a force that is felt or an essence that can be seen, instead it is a substance that mediates between bodies and can be consumed.

This version of aura is now much more similar to the concept of affective atmosphere discussed by more contemporary theorists. While in the Artwork essay aura was a quality inherent within an art object, an absorbing force resulting from the object’s particular history, the version of aura that quietly arises in Benjamin’s other writings exists between objects, in the air. Hansen suggests that, outside of the Artwork essay, “aura is not an inherent property of persons or objects but pertains to the medium of perception.” Like the air itself, medium is described as an “in-between substance or agency,” but specifically it is a substance “that mediates and constitutes meaning.” Giuliana Bruno similarly defines medium as “an intertwining matter through which impressions are conveyed to the senses… a living environment of expression, transmission, and storage.” Affective atmosphere is described in terms similar to medium as

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67 Ibid., 338
69 Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura,” 351.
70 Ibid., 342.
71 Ibid.
72 Bruno, Surface, 5.
well: it is “a distributed and diffuse field of intensities, circulating within but also moving beyond and around bodies.”

Aura, then, like affective atmosphere, can be thought of as an in-between medium for feeling and perception. But Benjamin articulates the idea that aura provokes a specific way of approaching the world more explicitly than those authors writing on affective atmosphere. As Hansen writes, “the aura is a medium that envelops and physically connects—and that blurs the boundaries between—subject and object, suggesting a sensory, embodied mode of perception.”

More specifically, this type of aura is in many ways the opposite of the distanced and absorbing quality of traditional art objects. Instead, it collapses distance and so encourages the use of touch, and is well suited to a type of viewing that juggles many viewing points at once. It is the presence of these qualities of touch and scattered vision that indicate that 

74 Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura”, 351.
“To spin tales (or yarns) is to exercise imagination. Even more than weaving, spinning mounds of tiny fibres into usable threads turns nothing into something, chaos into order.”

Photograph by author, 2016. JPEG file.

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I.

Look up from the inside of one of the cloth cylinders and you will see the slowly rotating spokes of a giant wheel. Set into motion by someone pulling down on ropes a few feet away, the contraption is not unlike that of a bicycle wheel urged forward via pedals and chains. Alternately, one could imagine an old Singer sewing machine, where the up and down of the needle is matched by the rotation of a cast iron disc. While it would be a simplification to claim that the two processes are the same, the technologies of treadle sewing machines (in which a foot pedal produces rotary motion) and bicycles are in fact intertwined.

In 1878, the Weed Sewing Machine Company was facing a slump in sales. Unsure of how to reinvigorate the company’s business, the owner, George Fairfield, agreed to manufacture a small number of “Columbia” style bicycles for Colonel Albert Pope. Because the factory’s workers already knew how to operate “specialized machine tools…[that] had general applicability in any industry that required the precision forging, stamping, and milling of metal parts,” it was straightforward to shift their final product from sewing machines to bicycles. The application of their existing machinery to a new product was so successful that they eventually switched entirely to bicycle manufacture. Indeed, a number of sewing machine companies switched to creating bicycles once they realized that they already had the necessary skillset and equipment. Early bicycle manufacturers even experimented with applying treadle technologies directly to bicycles, creating a vehicle where the pedals are pushed directly down rather than in a circular motion.

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Across the room, more spinning is taking place. Behind a mesh screen a woman sits perched on a stool, wool piled at her side and a drop spindle slowly bobbing up and down in front of her. As Hamilton explains,

Whorl…is also the name given to the spherical weight on the end of a drop spindle which increases or maintains the spindle’s momentum for drawing yarn by hand from strands of plant or animal fiber. When the shaft stills, the newly spun yarn is wound around the spindle. Successive lengths thicken above the whorl, and the accumulating weight makes the spindle rotate longer and more easily. We know from archaeological records that the making and weaving of thread is one of the oldest technologies, but the specific origins of spinning are lost.\(^{78}\)

But if the temporal origin of spinning has been lost, its consequent history has not. For instance, we know that in late eighteenth-century England, spinning employed more than one million married women, “providing about a third of the income of poorer families.”\(^{79}\)

But what of this woman, sitting in an art installation and watching a spindle bob up and down, up and down in front of her. Is she creating yarn for a sweater, perhaps even for a sweater that will later be undone, stitch-by-stitch, by the attendant sitting a few yards away from this one? Does she spin simply for the soothing rhythm, or because she wants to be involved in the creation of a work of art?

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\(^{79}\) Postrel, “Losing the Thread.”
RHYTHM

Standing in the center of Pier 9, a series of quiet rhythms snake in and out of one another. At the far end of the warehouse the spindle drops down and spins up, drops down and spins up. Meanwhile, ropes throughout the room bob up and down, up and down, up and down and up and down. In the air wheels spin in a constant circle, but below the curtains billow at a slower pace, revealing a face only to cover it again with another quick reveal allowed only after several breaths. A video projected onto the side of a container follows a series of letters with a consistently slow pan to the right, while directly in front of the projected surface a woman tensely rips stitches from a sweater at odd intervals, a stitch here then another after carefully choosing a spot another and another and another. Bells chime here and there and small waves from the river lap at the building’s side. All the sounds and visual beats make the space feel full, but they never cohere into what we might think of as a song.

Throughout the twentieth century theorists like John Dewey and Henri Lefebvre (a thinker already central to my understanding of space) worked to develop the field of “rhythmanalysis.” Rhythm was seen as a major part of the experience of daily life, and both theorists hoped that rhythmic movements in the form of callisthenic exercises could help bodies break out of the alienating patterns of repetitive factory work and provide a source of rejuvenation.80 Rhythmic movement, they thought “could restore wholeness and organic unity in a life perceived as fractured and disordered.”81 Derek McCormack points out that this train of thought can be carried too far if breaks in a pattern or moments of arrhythmic movement are pathologized—but the idea of making rhythm a central focus when attempting to understand modern life is an interesting one.

The prospects of rhythmic motion as catharsis aside, however, Lefebvre and Dewey’s theories remain valuable for the ways in which they frame rhythm as a method of structuring mood. Summarizing Lefebvre, McCormack writes, “epistemologically, rhythmanalysis involves the cultivation of a peculiar style of attentiveness open to becoming affected by the rhythmic spacetimes of everyday life.”82 The idea that part of affective experience is attunement to rhythm is not unique to the discipline of rhythmanalysis. A number of contemporary theorists have similarly articulated the association between rhythm and affect. Giuliana Bruno, for instance, writes that, “[mood] is driven by the tissuelike rhythm of unreeling as a state of mind,”83 and Erin Manning more directly stated that, “rhythm gives affective tonality to experience.”84 In each instance, rhythm is seen as modulating feeling and affect, whether for individuals or groups. This connection between mood and rhythm may seem abstract, but examples are easy to come by. The fast, rhythmic sound of train wheels might resonate with one’s heartbeat in order to make one feel excited or frightened. Or, in the case of habitus, the repetitive whoosh of the turning wheels could be quietly soothing, whether in their own right or in the moments when they coincide with a visitor’s breathing. In this way, rhythm produces and modulates the aura (or affective atmosphere) of habitus.

80 Derek McCormack, Refrains, 49.
81 Ibid., 45.
82 Ibid., 42.
83 Bruno, Surface, 18.
84 Manning, Relationscapes, 9.
the nature of the rows

Natalie Shapero

Ringing

The collective, organized tolling of a set of large bells in successive variations is known as *campanology*, or, more plainly, *change ringing*. The sound of the bells gives rise to, in the words of Willard G. Wilson, an "expression of public feeling." Exuberance or solemnity or wrath or mirth or pain—the same sequence of sounds might evoke different emotions depending on the events of the day, the chislings of history, the upturns and downturns. The gaze and the smile, the frown and the grimace. The opening of the bell is called the *melody*.

Change ringing cannot be done in solitude. The process is a social space in which the ringers must converge, form a circle—*a knot*—with their bodies, concert on sequence and pace. The ringers in the process, do not look up at the bells nor do they look at the ropes they hold in their hands. They instead look at their fellow ringers as the ropes held by others, at the rising and falling surrounding like a curtain. Repetition the ability to observe, from the movement of the ropes, which bell is tolling and which is about to toll. Ringing changes requires deaf energy and stamina, the innate force of the inhabited body. It also requires restraint; times of silence and holding-off, the absence of movement when movement is uncalled for. The alternating swiftness and stillness of the sally. The sally, the plush section of the rope in the ringer's grasp. The woodsmen of the sally against the ground, its animal feel.

The ringing of bells is often associated with religious exercise. From David L. Sorensen's *The New Testament*: "It seems strange that a generation which tolerates the upturn of the internal combustion engine and the whirling of the jazz band should be so vulnerable to the one loud noise that is made to the glory of God"—and the robust upward flight of the ropes, as if in evaluation. But the practice of change ringing can be so casuval and complex that clergy members often forbade their congregations from engaging in it on the sabbath, the day that was reserved for rest from work. Katherine Hunt, from her article "Campanologismo,? "Ringers have to work as one body: all performing the same action, like rowers in a boat, but—unlike rowers—not at the same time...."

It is work, to move the body over water or the bell across the air. The order in which the bells are rung is referred to as the *nature of the rows*, and the most complex, peak are those in which the ordering is not repeated. In this way, the ringing of the bells is like the movement of a living being: ever changing. It is like the dance of bringing fabric, dependent on chance and the shifts of air, the motion of the room around it, the pull and release. The collective, organized tolling of a set of large bells in successive variations is known as *campanology*, or, more plainly, *the Touch.*
VIRTUALITY

In the midst of habitus, it can be hard to know exactly where to direct one’s focus. There are the swirling fabrics, the bobbing ropes, the occasional squeal of an excited child or the ongoing chatter of visitors, the sight and smell of the river, the film, the two attendants dedicatedly going about their work, and countless other details available to be noticed. A stream of images is saved in my memory and quickly resurfaces when I describe the project, but on one occasion, when attempting to recount my experience of habitus to a friend, a new detail bubbled up in my recollection: the sound of bells. Although I do not remember being conscious of it at the time of my visit to Pier 9, in retrospect I realized that, yes, there had been sounds beyond those made by the visitors or the rustling of the Tyvek. As someone pulled down on a rope a bell would chime faintly… it was unclear if every rope was connected to a bell because the sounds were scattered, seemingly random, and soft enough that they could easily go unnoticed.

An installation like habitus holds within it so many moving pieces, engages so many of the senses at once that it is difficult to focus on every detail. This does not mean, however, that these details are not perceived. As in the case of the bells, our senses often take in much more information than we are consciously aware of. And this sense data that is taken up by our “flitting and barely conscious peripheral-vision perception,” far from being inconsequential, is often central to the experience of a sensually rich environment. Pallasmaa argues that immersive spaces (particularly interiors) prompt this type of peripheral vision, and even writes that “peripheral vision envelops us in the flesh of the world.” Others have written that texture especially “tends to be liminally registered ‘on the border of properties of touch and vision.’” It seems that it is often the tactile, fleshy qualities of physical space that get taken up by this not-wholly-conscious form of perception.

Benjamin categorizes these unnoticed and unintentional sensations as “unconscious optics.” They might equally, however, be described by a term that is more commonly used today: the virtual. As with the optical unconscious, the virtual consists of “perceptions that remain on the fringes…because the conscious mind must block them out in order not to be overloaded by an insupportable amount of stimulation…it is always available, but it is usually screened out.” Stimulating environments like habitus prompt sensory data to slowly accrue in the body, to build up as sediment that the subject may or may not one day become aware of. These environments prompt the collection of information that may remain forever tucked away in the subconscious or may later resurface into their awareness, as the sound of the bells did for me.

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86 Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin, 13.
DISTRACTION
Or, hyper attention

With so many competing stimuli, it is reasonable to describe the experience of the Pier 9 installation as one of distraction. Yet, in casual discourse distraction typically is not seen as a positive state to find oneself in. It implies being scattered, disengaged, unable to focus even in moments when concentration is necessary. It is distraction that is consistently lamented when discussing life in the digital age—the idea that we are in a constant state of distraction is pointed to as a sign of the deterioration of the modern subject, a sign of our increasing inability to connect with others or think critically.

Benjamin acknowledges the negative qualities of distraction in his discussions of the modern city, but in some of his writings he also makes a somewhat surprising claim: in certain instances a state of distraction can be productive, rather than reductive. Taking up the example of film, he describes the experience of attempting to focus on a single image in a film only to be overwhelmed by the rapid progression of frames: “the spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change.”\footnote{Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 238.} The viewer is not utterly overwhelmed by the constantly shifting images, but they cannot maintain a critical distance from it either—the viewer must take in the film without simultaneously analyzing and being conscious of all of the information they are being exposed to. What is important to note in this example is that despite being engaged in distracted viewing, audience members do not necessarily turn their attention away from the film. As R.L. Rutsky points out when discussing the root of the German word that Benjamin uses, Zerstreuung, the word “distracted” can be misleading because the type of viewing being described is “not so much a loss of attention as a scattering…dispersed inasmuch as it takes place in an arbitrary, incidental, and not wholly conscious fashion.”\footnote{R.L. Rutsky, “Benjamin, Dispersion, and Cinema,” \textit{symploke} 15, no. 1/2 (2007): 18.}

To address the potentially misleading connotations of the word distraction, I find it helpful to turn instead to a term introduced by N. Katherine Hayles: “hyper attention.” Presented in opposition to “deep” attention, Hayles describes hyper attention in terms very similar to those used to define productive distraction: “hyper attention excels at negotiating rapidly changing environments in which multiple foci compete for attention.”\footnote{N. Katherine Hayles, “Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes,” \textit{Profession} (2007): 188.} As with Benjamin’s positive use of the term distraction, hyper attention forgoes deep contemplation in favor of a dispersed and shifting awareness of the external world, “a more flexible, perceptually alert presence of mind.”\footnote{Carolin Duttlinger, “Between Contemplation and Distraction: Configurations of Attention in Walter Benjamin,” \textit{German Studies Review} 30, no. 1 (February 2007): 33-54.} Describing this way of approaching the world as a form of attention is helpful because it no longer implies that the viewer is gaining less information about what is in front of them—it does not indicate an absence of focus so much as a multiplicity of focal points. It is this form of attention that is provoked by \textit{habitus}. 

Close to twenty feet of white cloth hangs from the ceiling in a cylinder, falling in smooth folds as if belonging to the hoop skirt of a giant. As the wind makes its way in from the river the bottom of the cloth rustles slightly, perhaps reaching out to brush the shoulder of someone walking close by. It is soft to the touch, and if disturbed it moves with a fluidity that suggests it could be made of light gauze. Yet this fabric is not delicately knit or lovingly woven. It is not technically a fabric at all. The stuff hanging from the ceiling is Tyvek (albeit Tyvek softened by being steeped in tea), a material more properly belonging to construction sites.

E.I. DuPont founded the company that invented Tyvek, DuPont, in 1802. Although the material is now manufactured in Richmond, Virginia and Shenzen, China (in the purchase of any one swath you are just as likely to be supporting American industry or fueling globalized economies) the company was originally located on the Brandywine, a river that snakes its way through Delaware and Pennsylvania. The company’s self-written history emphasizes that E.I. Dupont cared about his workers’ safety and “shared his father’s ideals about… making a harmonious relationship between capital and labor.” At the same time, DuPont came to the United States in large part because his family’s moderate political views forced them out of their home country during the French Revolution, so his company’s attitudes towards the working class laborers it employed would likely have been complicated.

Used in products such as protective apparel, sterile medical packaging, cargo covers, industrial packaging, posters, and envelopes, "Tyvek® is a family of tough, durable spunbonded olefin sheet products that are stronger than paper and more cost-effective and versatile than fabrics." Discovered by DuPont in the 1950’s, spun bonding is a process that allows sheets of material to be produced without being woven or knitted, thus distinguishing them from fabrics. During the process, polyethylene (a plastic) is dissolved in a chemical solvent and pumped into a chamber. Here it is exposed to high heat and pressure until the solvent is “flashed off,” leaving behind filaments smaller than a human hair that have bonded into a highly structured, microscopic web. What set this process apart from others, and what apparently first caused DuPont to develop the method, was the fact that the resulting material “could protect against external moisture while allowing internal moisture to escape.”

Tyvek’s value, then, comes from its being a porous barrier, from its ability to mediate between interior and exterior. It makes sense that its primary use is as house wrap, the papery material that covers a home under construction, protecting it from the elements before the finishing layer of the walls is put in place. House wrap itself is an intermediary product, one that both signifies exposure and provides protection, a product that lies in the intersection between the private, domestic space of the home and the public space of the construction site. Within Hamilton’s exhibition, Tyvek mimics its original use in a new context as it creates a permeable barrier between the public warehouse and the intimate sanctuary within each cylinder.

96 Larry Operath, Textile (Delhi, India: Lotus Press, 2007), 87.
98 “History,” DuPont.
“the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.”99

TACTILITY

I. texxture

When the softened Tyvek wraps around me, I am touched not just by a smooth, slightly cool cloth, but also with all of the history that the cloth holds within its fibers. Even if I am not consciously aware of it, I have come into contact not just with the cloth’s texture, but also (as Renu Bora would call it) with its texxture: “the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being.”

Giuliuna Bruno echoes this sentiment, asserting that the visual is not just literally textured, but also holds texture in terms of the layers of history that it wears.

II. the tactility of distracted viewing

Because environments that require hyper attention do not allow viewers to maintain critical distance by consciously taking in each piece of information presented to them, viewers engaging in hyper attention are forced to exist amidst their environment (even if only through an imagined projection into a picture plane) rather than apart from it. As a result, hyper attention causes viewers to gather information about a space by using their sense of touch—“it is a way of looking that feels its way around the place it finds itself.”

It seems that this tactile mode of navigation is best exemplified by architecture, an art form that Benjamin appreciates for having always invited hyper attention. After all, “buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and by sight.”

As an architectural space that promotes hyper attention and harbors a rich variety of textures (and texxtures), habitus certainly invites viewers to understand their surroundings through “tactile appropriation.” Visitors are brought close to the people and objects around them, rather than held at arm’s length by the distancing effect of the contemplative gaze.

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100 Sedgwick, Touching Feeling, 14.
101 Bruno, Surface, 5.
104 Although this has been argued previously, it is important to remember here that the breaking down of distance and the use of touch does not constitute a destruction of aura in the sense in which I am using the term (even though it certainly would be opposed to auratic experience as it is outlined in the Artwork essay). Rather, this tactile apprehension of an auratic space is, as Hansen writes on page 350 of Benjamin’s Aura, one of those “salient features of auratic experience…[that is] asymmetrically entwined rather than simply incompatible with technological reproducibility.”
“Perhaps…it is precisely the unfocused vision of our time that is again capable of opening up new realms of vision and thought…[it] may emancipate the eye from its patriarchal domination and give rise to a participatory and empathetic gaze.”

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105 Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, 40.
INTERSUBJECTIVITY or EMпатетIC VIEWING

Beyond its recuperation of underutilized senses, hyper attention also can be understood as an unusually empathetic way of approaching the world. Latham argues that, in studying the relationship between distracted modes of perception and the auratic, Benjamin “outlines a novel theory of intersubjectivity between humans and the nonhuman…[that] suggests a range of productive avenues for enframing an ethics of encounter within the contemporary city.”106 This intersubjectivity arises in part due to a particular description of aura that does not appear in the Artwork essay: aura as an object’s return of the gaze. It is as if aura lends objects an air of subjectivity. To Latham, “the object’s returning of the look in fact sets in motions a complex series of movements between the self and the auratic object that undermines any dominance of the self over the object,” thus creating a more egalitarian relationship between subject and object.107

More simply, when discussing different modes of perception Benjamin states that contemplation causes the viewer to be absorbed by the work of art, whereas distracted viewing (or hyper attention) allows the viewer to absorb the art object.108 But if hyper attention inevitably involves an element of the optical unconscious or the virtual, if a viewer can never wholly take in a film, a complex installation, or even just a shopping mall, it seems that they do not have mastery over the object of attention in the same way that a work of art had mastery over a contemplative viewer. Instead, being immersed literally or imaginatively in the space of the object involves “a breaking down, or a short-circuiting, of the split between subject and object without destroying (exactly) the autonomy of either.”109

To me, this encouragement of intersubjectivity is in part what prompts the urge to redeem aura as a politically hopeful phenomenon. Although Benjamin at one point claimed that aura withered with mechanical reproducibility, if we can think of the “salient features of auratic experience…[as] asymmetrically entwined rather than simply incompatible with technological reproducibility” then there is a possibility for sites in which people encounter one another and objects around them without a dominating instinct, even within contemporary cities.110 Given the way in which aura encourages an empathetic relation amongst people, and between people and objects, it seems that auratic settings might promote a generally more egalitarian form of social interaction. We might think back, also, to Lefebvre’s assertion that in order to create social change we must first produce new social spaces. Might this new space prompt a new form of social interaction, one that maintains mutual feeling and is rich with meaning, even as it exists within the modernized, mechanized city? Might habitus, a space that harbors a virtual, tactile, rhythmic, affective atmosphere, be producing precisely the sort of aura that encourages empathetic encounters between people, materials, and time periods? (If it is not clear already, my answer is yes.)

107 Ibid., 467.
III
Are there any continuous threads that run throughout these different entries? Can they be woven together or are they like Tyvek, a sheet of fibers bonded together at random?

Paradoxically, what brings these fragments into some cohesion is in fact their intermediary quality. They are all things that exist to connect, that slip between inner and outer and so cannot quite be contained. Pier 9 was (and is) a point of transition, a location that brought together and intermixed people and goods before dispersing them. Tyvek is a semipermeable barrier between house and environment, and creates a series of interiors within Pier 9 that carve out some momentary privacy within public space. Habitus is the embodied intercessor between self and society. Space is supposed to be produced between moving bodies and meaning is supposed to arise in the interstices between things in relation. Affect is not contained within an individual but exists between people and can be shared. And aura is a medium of perception, of emotion, of meaning, that exists in-between (that perhaps can even be breathed and in so doing can bridge the barrier between the inside of the body and the outside world). It appears that people, places, and things are more permeable than we are typically comfortable admitting.

There is, of course, a more academic thread that runs through this commonplace as well. In case it was lost in the fabric of the paper, it can be teased out here (even if there is some risk of the rest of the piece coming loose and falling away). The atmosphere produced by *habitus*, one that holds meaning and emotion that visitors may or may not pick up on, is modulated by rhythm, and is best sensed when a visitor’s focus bounces between a number of different focal points. In this state of hyper attention, information accumulates in a visitor’s body below the level of consciousness and they are encouraged to take in the world through touch as much as through sight. What’s more, visitors apprehend but do not gain mastery over the people, objects, images, and materials around them. I cannot claim that by crafting an auratic environment like
this an artist can create a utopian community on a small scale or that they can ensure compassionate interactions amongst visitors. Yet, when visiting the piece, I felt that there was significance in the instinct for me to make smiling eye contact with someone across the room as a group of children shrieked and played between us. Whether called intersubjectivity or simply shared experience, I wanted more of it.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A
Selected List of Ann Hamilton Projects Related to habitus

CURTAINS

**(volumen)**
1995
Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, IL
motor-and-chain-driven ceiling track and curtain
variable dimensions

**(lumen-curtain)**
1995
Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA
cotton cloth, cable, pulley, metal ring
32 x 49 ¼ inches

**bearings**
1996
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Sydney, Australia
organza fabric, two steel mounts with two
electric controllers
174 x 196 inches
Collection of the Musee d’Art Contemprain de
Montreal, Montreal, Quebec, Canad
filament I
1996
Sean Kelly Gallery
New York, NY
organza fabric, steel mount with electronic controller
curtain
height 365cm, overall installation height variable curtain
diameter when spinning, ca. 304.8cm steel: diameter 156

filament II
1996
Sean Kelly Gallery
New York, NY
organza fabric, steel mount with electronic controller
168 x 144 inches
Collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

appeals
2003
Istanbul Biennale
Istanbul, Turkey
Five curtains mechanically opening and closing, 32
speakers with recorded voice
the event of a thread
2012-2013
Park Avenue Armory
New York, NY

WINDINGS

lineament
1994
Ruth Bloom Gallery
Santa Monica, CA
plywood walls, suspended seat and table, film projector
light, seated figure lifting and winding cut text in
continuous line from a prepared book

Untitled
1994
The Fabric Workshop and Museum
Philadelphia, PA
Mixed media Handmade galvanized tin box, containing
one ball of hair and one ball of concrete.
4.5 x 4.5 x 8.75 in. (11.43 x 11.43 x 22.22 cm.)
mattering
1997-1998
Part of the exhibition "Ann Hamilton: Present-Past, 1984-1997"
Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon
Lyon, France

the theater is a blank page
2015
Wexner Center for the Arts, The University of Ohio
Columbus, OH

OTHER PROJECTS

tropos
1993-1994
Dia Center for the Arts
New York, NY
**Untitled**
1994
The Fabric Workshop and Museum
Philadelphia, PA

“A limited edition multiple encased in a glass and wood vitrine, her *Untitled* project is a collar fabricated from linen and horse hair. Strands of horse hair were used to embroider a 16th century-style alphabet on the inside of the collar. The unfinished ends of the embroidered hair pass through to the exterior of the collar, forming a swirling, circular mass of hair. The object recalls historic relics—an Elizabethan ruff, for example—yet remains connected to sensory experience through its assumed placement around a person’s throat with the letters of the alphabet resting near the voice box. *Untitled* references a relationship between the rapid growth of literacy and a gradual devaluation of non-verbal knowledge, such as that learned and experienced in the body” (http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/Artists/ArtistDetail.aspx?ArtistId=9858c202-25d6-4792-877b-a894d1c02c0f).

**the common SENSE**
2015
Henry Art Gallery
Seattle, WA

“As a Visiting Fellow, [Hamilton] conducted research in the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, the University Libraries Special Collections, and the Henry's holdings of costumes, textiles, and photographs. The material elements of the exhibition are drawn from these collections.

In this project, touch is not only physical contact but a form of intellectual and emotional recognition. The exhibition is full of images and skins of animals: once alive, they touched and were touched in return by the world they inhabited. For Hamilton the common S E N S E is "an address to the finitude and threatened extinctions we share across species—a lacrimosa, an elegy, for a future being lost” (https://henryart.org/exhibitions/ann-hamilton-the-common-sense).
FURTHER READING

An indication of the different directions this thesis could have taken, and a reminder of prior arguments surrounding Hamilton’s work that may be taken up again as a discourse surrounding habitus continues to grow.


An interview with Hamilton is included in a book that tries to trace the influence of Buddhist thought/spirituality in contemporary art. The interviewer draws a connection between the Buddhist concept of the “mind of don’t know” and Hamilton’s sense that there is a good deal of unintentionality in her process of creating works. Hamilton also touches on her interest in the hand’s trace and touch and viewers’ bodily experiences within her works, among other things. This work could help to expand a discussion of visitors’ embodied understandings of habitus.

Christopher Braddock. *Performing Contagious Bodies: Ritual Participation in Contemporary Art*.

Christopher Braddock places an analysis of Hamilton’s malediction within a larger discussion of anthropological theories of magic and their relation to contemporary art. Through a complex chronology of theoretical trends, Braddock ultimately presents Hamilton’s mouth casts as symbols that are participated in by individuals past, present, and future, across time and space. They have a metaphorical relationship to the social history of a factory (standing in for the dead), as well as more mundane connections to bread, mouths, etc. Calling them “tele-things” because of their immaterial communication, Braddock sees the mouth casts as constituting mystical contamination, although whether they have been animated by bearing the trace of Hamilton’s interior surface, or whether they have in fact contaminated the participants, is ambiguous. Braddock’s theories could be a useful way of understanding how the histories of the objects present in habitus actually come to affect viewers.


Deleuze’s theorization of surface and the fold could be used in an analysis of habitus, particularly regarding the Tyvek curtains at Pier 9. Deleuze’s work is also the foundation for many of the more contemporary theorists utilized in this thesis such as Giuliana Bruno and Derek McCormack, and his writing could have been used as a theoretical framework with which to bring together the work of these other authors.


In this lecture, Stewart reflects on tropos. She discusses the fact that tropos is more industrial in its style of labor than works by Hamilton that were created in a more
communal fashion. At the same time, she feels that *tropos* represents Hamilton’s conviction that “the interrelation of local and global is… the concrete underpinning of each human act and each product of human labor” (158). Perhaps most importantly, Stewart sees the visitor’s struggle to understand both the audio recording and the actions of the attendant as a catalyst for grappling with the nature of human relationships and the interaction of interior and exterior worlds.

McTighe, Monica Eileen. “‘Epic Forgetting’: Mapping Memory Practices in Installation Art of the 1980s and 1990s.”

McTighe’s dissertation applies theories of memory to installation art from the 1980’s and 1990’s, particularly focusing on Benjamin’s categories of involuntary and voluntary memory. Unlike voluntary memory that consists of images devoid of sensation, involuntary memory is a vivid and embodied experience. This type of memory consists of an auratic experience provoked by authentic, typically handcrafted artworks. The issue of handicraft is important to many theorists as standing in opposition to the rise of technology and mechanically made products representative of the alienated contemporary society, a phenomenon that they also see as heralding a loss of memory or “epic forgetfulness.” Hamilton initially appears to be embracing the utopian ideal of handicraft, emphasizing unalienated human labor and embodied experience through her use of attendants and her sensory environments. By creating aura through immersive, crafted environments, McTighe sees Hamilton’s work as being connected to the “initial, aura-filled upsurge of vivid [involuntary] memory” (46). At the same time however, all of the apparently organic or artisanal elements of Hamilton’s installations are supported by technology. In this way, Hamilton’s installations “are not so much a revival of the pre-industrial body and pre-linguistic, as dream spaces where the body and machine begin to merge” (83). Although she employs a slightly different understanding of aura than the one that appears in this thesis, McTighe’s dissertation would be an interesting addition to the understanding of *habitus* laid out in this thesis.


One of the most thorough analyses of the presence of books in Hamilton’s works, Partridge analyzes the “altered books” used in three of Hamilton’s installations: *indigo blue*, *tropos*, and *lineament*. She argues that Hamilton uses these altered books to reveal the limitations of written language and to underscore the possibilities of alternative, bodily experiences. According to Partridge, “the words on the page fail to sufficiently embody that which they represent,” and so audience members are denied these words and must turn instead to their bodily experience in the space (28). Partridge does not see Hamilton as rejecting language, but rather as exposing the limitations of language in order to strengthen the importance of multisensory experiences and to question the dominance mind is often given over matter. Her dissertation would be useful if trying to better understand the relation between textile in *habitus* and other projects.

Schwartzburg, Mary Alden. “Reading in Four Dimensions: The Poetics of the Contemporary Experimental Book.”

Adding to a discourse surrounding *tropos* and a discussion of reading in Hamilton’s work
in general, Schwartzburg argues that *tropos* is an investigation into the nature of books and a physical representation of the process of reading. The combination of the audio recording, the tactile floor, and the pages of a book serve to transform the space of *tropos* into a representation of the mind of the reader. At the same time, the burning action of the attendant prompts questions about the nature of book and text—can a book without text still be a book? Where is text located? Schwartzburg asserts that Hamilton’s installation constitutes an exploration of our relationship with books and reading without offering any concrete conclusions.


Simon’s first book on Hamilton is a catalogue documenting all of Hamilton’s object-based works from 1984-2006 and is a useful overview of Hamilton’s oeuvre.


This book catalogues all of Hamilton’s time-based works created before 2002, as well as some of Hamilton’s earlier projects that were not included in *Inventory of Objects.*