



Experiments in situated knowledge

Part academic presentation, part performance, part discursive documentary, this presentation took an alternative approach to the format of conference presentation in order to argue, by constructive example, that art arrives at its own unique forms of knowledge and knowledge generation through speculative experimentation with concrete reality, form and process.

Submitted by Lesley Punton
Output No. 1



OUTPUT

Lesley Punton (GSA) and Jim Hamlyn (GSA & Robert Gordon University) presented a collaborative paper that was presented within the thematic of experimental discourse & practice at NIEA (National Institute of Experimental Arts at the University of New South Wales)

<http://blogs.unsw.edu.au/niea-experimentalartsconference/>

in Sydney, Australia in August 2011.

Through the premise that art arrives at its own unique forms of knowledge and knowledge generation through speculative experimentation with concrete reality, form and process, Hamlyn & Punton conducted a series of filmed interviews with a range of artists, aiming to dissect the relationship that artists have with ideas of experimentation and play. This film (see link later in portfolio) formed part of their presentation

Title

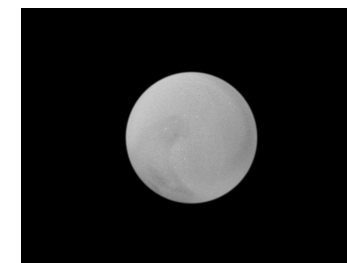
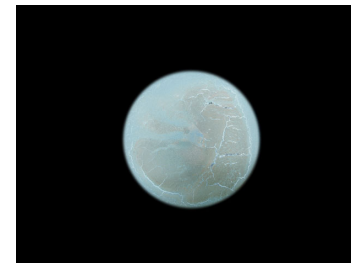
Experiments in Situated Knowledge
Conference paper/presentation

Submission No.

1

Authors/Creators

Lesley Punton & Jim Hamlyn



*Experiments in a coffee cup – L Punton & J Hamlyn
Made during residency at SCA, Summer 2011*

CONTEXT

From the NIEA website:

*"We have entered the experimental age...
Experiments are no longer conducted just in the
laboratory. They have become collective experiments
that concern each and every one of us."*

Bruno Latour, 2004

What is experimentation? What makes art 'experimental'? What are the results of aesthetic experiments and why do we need them? Could artists invent new modes of experimentation with/for science? What are the differences between experiments and inventions; experiments and failures; experiment and innovation? How do we set up ethico-scientific-aesthetic experiments?

This conference showcased and discussed innovative arts projects by leading practitioners, thinkers and research groups that model new forms of transdisciplinarity and offer new ways of addressing real-world issues. These include works that have successfully 'changed the world' as well as speculative initiatives that radically change the way we think. It surveyed the results and potential of Experimental Arts, inviting leaders in the field to discuss how we can extend and support a platform for path-breaking experimentation.."



CONTEXT

"We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched." -Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Part academic presentation, part performance, part discursive documentary, this presentation took an alternative approach to the format of conference presentation in order to argue, by constructive example, that art arrives at its own unique forms of knowledge and knowledge generation through speculative experimentation with concrete reality, form and process.

The profound success of certain forms of epistemic enquiry - principally scientific research and academic thought - has resulted in a relative marginalization of creative and improvisatory forms of critical and analytical investigation and to a parallel adoption, within the arts especially, of aspects of the terminology of science in order to legitimate the processes and practices of art production and consumption. For example, the use of the term 'experiment' is itself predicated upon an implicit

association with empirical science as opposed to the more abstract trials and even 'play' that are fundamental to art production.

Drawing upon the experiments of Swiss artist Roman Signer (who's work literally fuses the improvisatory and experiential with the more exacting necessities and laws of physics, often to explosive effect), this presentation sought to propose that the language and significance of alternative forms of communication (situated knowledge, contemplation, humor, sex, reverie, narrative etc.) offer valuable ways to understand the indispensable contribution of experimental creativity (art) to our understanding of the world and our place within it.

Our presentation came under the thematic of experimental discourse and practice in the main conference at NIEA.

<http://blogs.unsw.edu.au/niea-experimentalartsconference/speakers/speakers-main-conference/>



*Roman Signer (image used in presentation) by
Punton & Hamlyn*

METHODOLOGY

By arguing that creative practice demands different approaches and methods in the gathering, synthesis and dissemination of data and information, Punton & Hamlyn eschewed the conventional practice of a read conference paper, experimenting with the way an active visual practice might influence the development and evolution of their presentation.

Concurrent with the delivery of this presentation, they were artists in residence at Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), where they were working on a collaborative body of work then titled *experiments in a coffee cup*, <http://lesleypunton.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/coffee-grounds.html> which later became re-titled as simply *coffee grounds*.

Notions of experimentation, scientific models of experimentation and situated knowledge became core concepts in developing the content of the paper they were later to deliver at the National Institute of Experimental Arts conference at the University of New South Wales in August 2011.

Before writing the paper, Punton & Hamlyn conducted a series of filmed interviews with artists in the UK (the film was shown in their conference presentation) regarding how artists view notions of experimentation, and this was a core element of this collaborative research. The interviews *experiments in art & science* can be viewed here : <http://vimeo.com/27673860>

Important references in the presentation were Donna Haraway's postmodern feminist theories of Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective (1987), and we explored experiments in practical knowledge, material thinking or discursive Experience.

John Dewey's thoughts on the scientific method were considered, and excerpts from interviews with John Cage on silence and laughter (shown from 3'17" - see link at end), and physicist Richard Feynman on beauty were shown.



Roman Signer (image used in presentation)

METHODOLOGY

Using this as a foundation, the works of Roman Signer, an artist who often makes works where “experimentation” is readily apparent in his practice, were discussed.

We felt it would seem unfair to apply a scientific expectation to Signer’s practice, after all, it was never intended to prove or disprove a hypothesis, nor to demonstrate a fact nor even make a discovery (though many would disagree with me in this last instance). We would contend that the “discoveries” have already largely been made in the initial imaginative visualization/conceptualization of the ideas and in the more speculative testing of methods and materials. For example, we rarely, if ever, see the many failures that inevitably occur in preparation for the work we do see. This is not to say that beautiful incidents and accidents are absent from Signer’s work but, due to the often hazardous materials and circumstances involved, there is perhaps less room for improvisation than might otherwise be the case.



*Dr Chris Wallace being interviewed in
“experiments in art and science” by Punton/Hamlyn*

METHODOLOGY

In a scientific experiment the outcome is paramount and is intended to either prove or disprove a theory. Once again, as with Signer, the result of the experiment is less a discovery than the realisation (or in the case of science – possibly the contradiction) of what has already been imagined. For Karl Popper this potential for confirmatory or dis-confirmatory outcome (testability and falsifiability) exactly differentiates science from pseudo science.

Scientific discoveries then, are the result of a two part process, first of theory formation followed by proof through experiment. If a test fails, either the experiment was poorly conceived, poorly conducted or else the theory was flawed. For this reason science attempts, wherever possible, to limit the number of variables in any given experiment in order to avoid rogue results. Art, on the other hand, often multiplies the variables in order to do the very reverse. Unexpected results in art, when they are not detrimental to the result, are often perceived and presented as discoveries since anything that contradicts expectation is likely to

provoke curiosity and may even have instructive value, if only on a technical level. Discoveries, thus encountered, are valued but rarely, if ever, become part of a systematic inquiry since the object of art is less about illustrating facts and securing knowledge than producing meaning and experience

Crucially, we proposed that if we force art to comply with the language and criteria of science then we are in danger of further marginalising, if not altogether stamping out, the practice of art in academia.

Our collaborative work made during residency at SCA was briefly referenced as constructive examples, along with Hamlyn's audio piece made for the conference "the laughter of philosophers" see <http://vimeo.com/27432863>

The full presentation which linked to a number of online film clips mentioned earlier (Cage & Feynman) can be viewed at the end of this file as an appendix. Our filmed interviews with artists, *Experiments in Art & Science* can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/27673860>



Dr Ian Balch being interviewed in Experiments in Art & Science

DISSEMINATION

Due to the nature of the presentation, it's primary point of dissemination was during the major 4 day international conference itself in the University of New South Wales. This was a large scale 4 day conference (2 days for the main conference of which we were part, and 2 days for a further postgraduate conference) with speakers and audience members from across the world, and had high attendance figures.

Other aspects of the presentation continue to be publicly accessible, such as the documentary film *Experiments in art & science* (see earlier link) which can be viewed online, and in texts written around the theme of the paper in J Hamlyn's blog *Thoughts on Art & Teaching* <http://thoughtsonartandteaching.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/experimentation-and-discovery-art-and.html> - axzz2ZOYWFsAM

The work that accompanied the exhibition has also been publicly exhibited, and was shown at Vault Art Glasgow, <http://www.vaultartglasgow.com/> in September 2011 where their work was shown by Glasgow based artist collective, Lapland.



John Niland Scientia Building, UNSW, location of conference. Image courtesy of UNSW.

Acknowledgements

The British Council for funding the residency at Sydney College of the Arts

Sydney College of the Arts for hosting the collaborative residency of Punton/Hamlyn

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Patricia Fleming Projects/Vault art Glasgow.

Lapland arts collective, Glasgow.

Thanks go to the following artists for agreeing to be interviewed and filmed by Punton/Hamlyn:

Dr. Ian Balch
Tor Jonsson
Peter McCaughey
Hugh Pizey
Judy Spark
Dr. Chris Wallace

Additional links :
John Cage interview
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y>

Richard Feynman interview
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbFM3rn4ldo>

The slides used in the conference presentation follow on as an appendix at the end of this pdf for reference.

Experiments in Situated Knowledge

Jim Hamlyn, Grays School of Art, Aberdeen Scotland and
Lesley Punton, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland

Artists in Residence, Sydney College of the Arts, August 2011



"Catching Fire (after Richard Serra)" Jim Hamlyn 2011



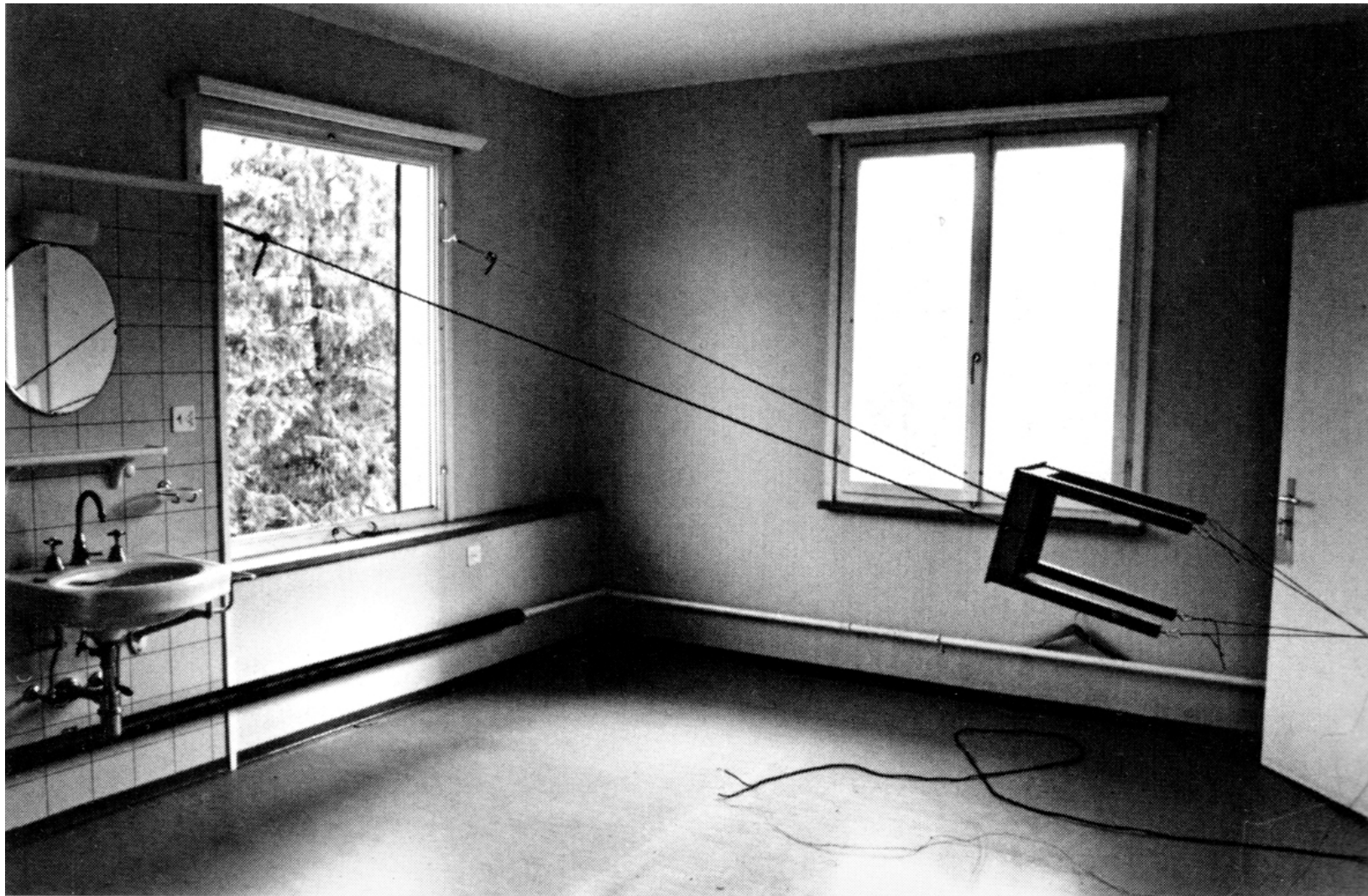
Experiments in art & science – interviews with artists - film.



Roman Signer



Roman Signer



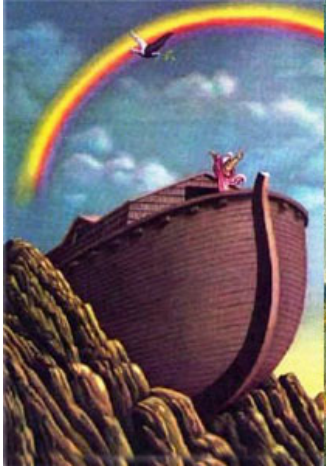
Roman Signer

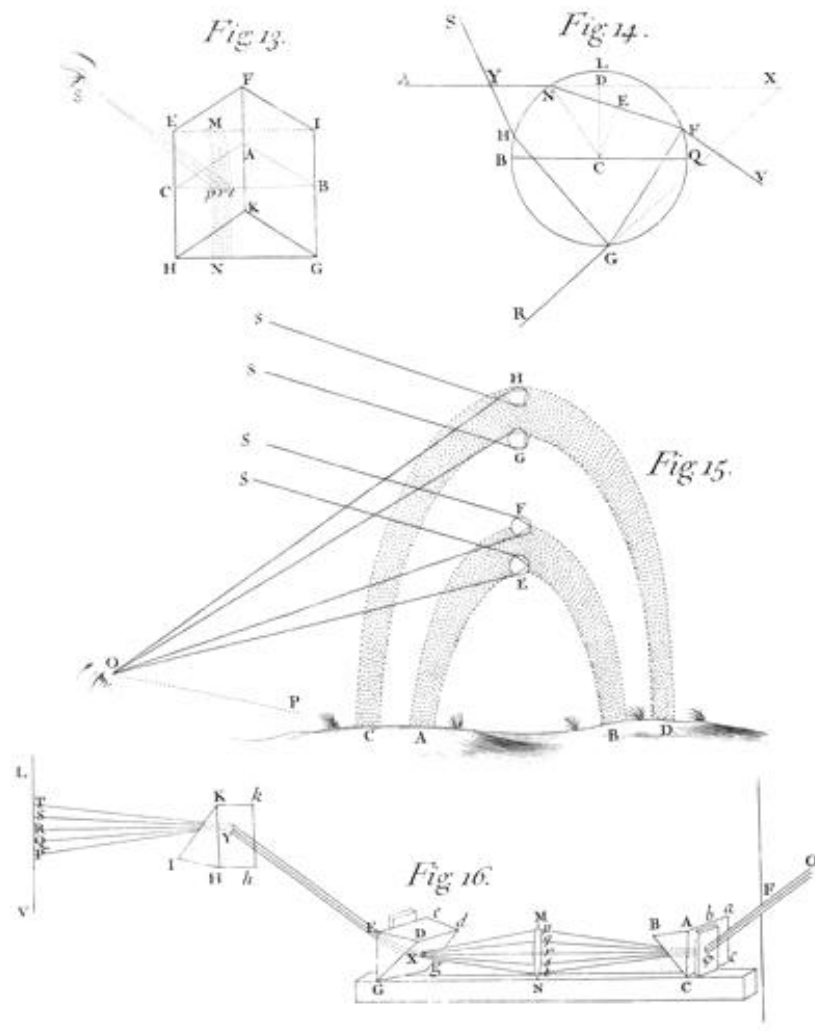


Roman Signer

“Scientific method is the only authentic means at our command for getting at the significance of our everyday experiences.”

-John Dewey, Experience and Education, 1938





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Sir Isaac Newton, "Opticks", 1704

“Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine -
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made”

Fragment from “Lamia”, John Keats 1819

*UNWEAVING
THE
RAINBOW*

**RICHARD
DAWKINS**

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER





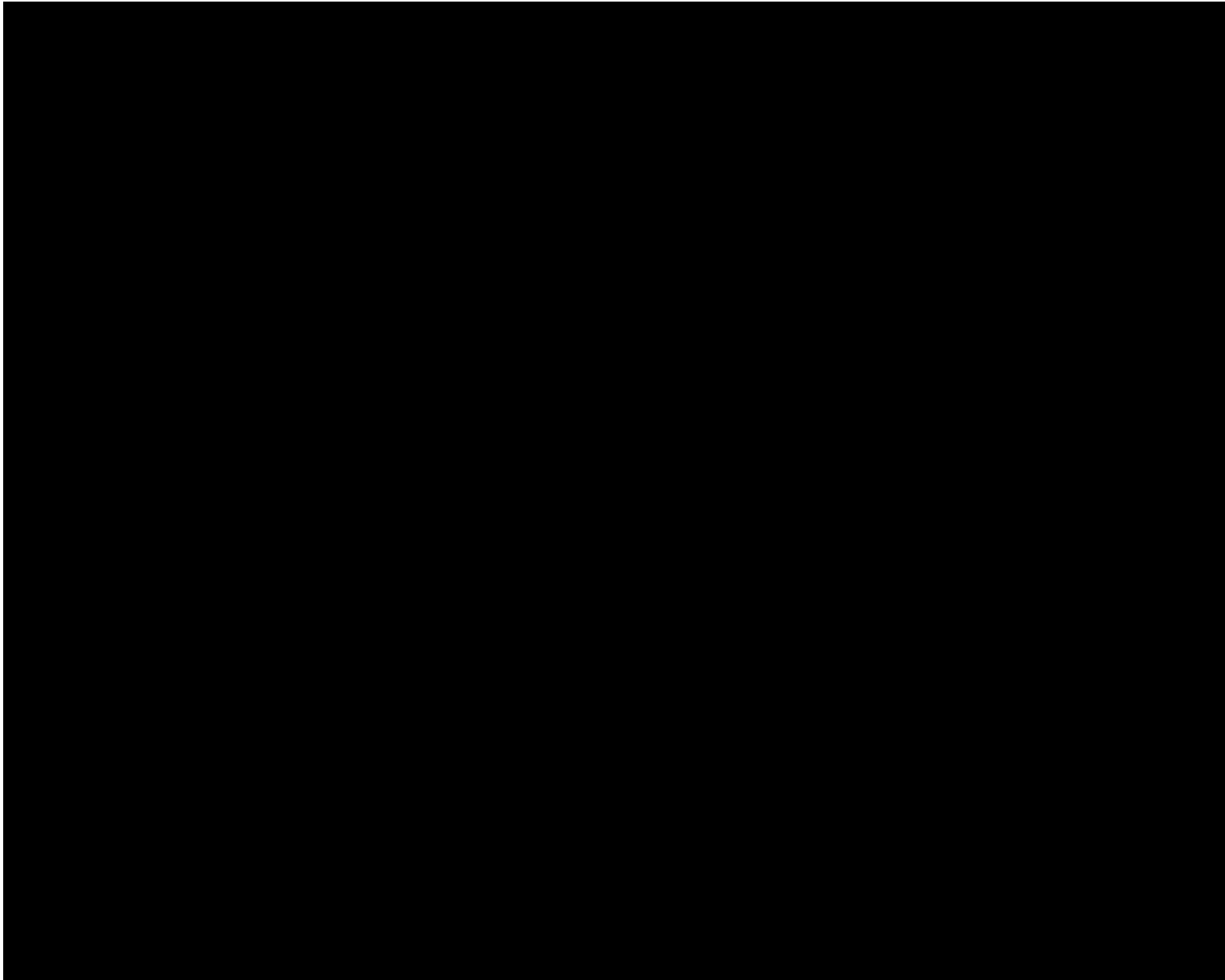
Physicist Richard Feynman, 1983 - film

"In an intellectual experience, the conclusion has a value on its own account. It can be extracted as a formula or as a "truth," and can be used in its independent entirety as factor and guide in other inquiries. In a work of art there is no such single self-sufficient deposit. The end, the terminus, is significant not by itself but as the integration of the parts. It has no other existence."

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934



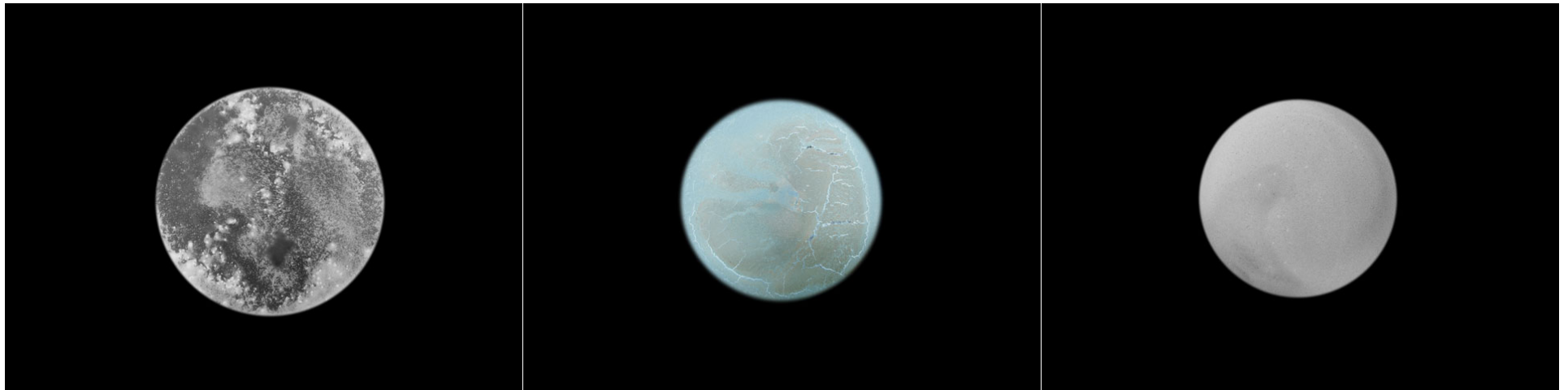
John Cage, "On Silence", New York 1991 - film



"The Laughter of Philosophers", August 2011, 47sec (source: Philosophy Bites Podcasts) - audio

"We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched."

-Ludwig Wittgenstein.



"Experiments in a Coffee Cup", Giclée Prints, Lesley Punton & Jim Hamlyn, Sydney, August, 2011