Hacking the aesthetic: David Haines and Joyce Hinterding’s new ecologies of signal

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Abstract
Award winning Australian electronic artists David Haines and Joyce Hinterding’s installation work is discussed as “signal-work.” Their work reconfigures signal within original assemblages involving subtle audio, high resolution video (both recorded and animated), kilometers of coiled copper wire, antennae or home-built electronics, electrostatic disturbances, the like of very low frequency radiation from the Milky Way, and cross-signal processing. The article develops a context for thinking about the work in terms of Whitehead’s process philosophy, as this is relevant to media theory, as well as concepts of plural ecology and ongoing differentiation drawn from Bateson and Guattari. Signal processing is seen as key to all this. The article argues that in Hinterding and Haines’ signal-work new sensations are produced, outside of the normal “syntax” of some models of aesthetic experience. This challenges some aspects of thinking about both aesthetics and political ecology.

Keywords: media arts; electronic arts; Australian art; technology and ecology; signal processing; aesthetics; sensation; technology and sensation

“It was hacked everything.”
(David Haines, discussing Hinterding and Haines’ installation, Purple Rain)

You sometimes smell the electricity, or feel the force of signal, in Australian artists Joyce Hinterding and David Haines’ installation artworks.† Perhaps no other artists process electricity and signals from as many different sources. They work with electrostatic disturbances in the atmosphere (Hinterding’s Electrical Storms, 1992), very high resolution digital video, home-made capacitors constructed from hundreds of carbon-coated beer glasses (Hinterding’s Siphon, 1991), computer game engines, kilometres of copper wire stretched or coiled into antennas, passing satellite signals (The Levitation Grounds, 1999–2000), very low frequency signal from the Milky Way (Electromagnetique Composition for Building, Plants and Stars, 2007), the low frequency radiation from gallery buildings or their own home, and cross-signal processing between many of these (Figures 1 and 2).

Their art is a kind of contemplative signal-work. Signal is no longer only (or sometimes even) a carrier for channeled messages. Rather signal in itself, in particular signal processing, is foregrounded.

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Signal is experienced as the felt tension between, and transformation of, forces and fields. For example, in Hinterding’s *Aeriology* (1995), in which she worked with 20 km of copper wire, electricity/signal seep out from/into huge copper coils and sheets. In such works, electricity and signal still function but often not in the usual way and not where they are usually found. A more recent example is Hinterding’s *Fields and Loops* series (from 2010, ongoing). This is a series of drawings that are also functioning electrical circuits.²

Hinterding and Haines’ signal-work allows us to think differently about the way that art can organize sensation (with sensation itself a kind of variable cross-signal processing across world and body). As such, their signal-work can be seen as a “hacking” of the aesthetic, a technical tampering with, and general re-purposing of, the aesthetic from within. In other words, Haines and Hinterding’s work challenges the often given or assumed organization of sensation—in concepts of the aesthetic, in artistic practice or in the experience of the works. In doing so, it also challenges the easy division of technics, the human, and the natural world (Figures 3 and 4).³

Such a breakdown of the division between technics and the natural world produces a strange remix of the forces involved. For example, Haines’ large-screen videos draw attention to the sheer technical, signal-processing force of high resolution digital rendering. Yet this technical force is often used to simulate hypernatural events: overly lush vegetation (*Electromagnetique Composition for Building, Plants and Stars*, 2007) or tree branches floating in the air (*The Levitation Grounds*, 1999–2000). Cityscapes are dwarfed by their geographical setting (*Two works for Wilhelm Reich*, 2006). The contents of a house—furniture and clothes—float out the windows and into orbit around the earth (*The Blinds and the Shutters*, 2001).

Hinterding and Haines’ mixing of forces also allows us to sense the end—indeed the always impossible status—of that which Whitehead decried as the “bifurcation of nature.”⁴ This is the false division of nature into the mind/perception on the one hand, and the object perceived on the other. In Hinterding and Haines’ work, there is
no easy inside from which to “perceive” or outside to be perceived. There is no final ordering of the world that would accommodate such a bifurcation, especially not via technics. Indeed, they constantly use technics to undo such a bifurcation. For example, in their recent award-winning work, *The Outlands* (2011), Haines and Hinterding used a game engine to construct environments that are navigated, in a darkened room, with a joystick made from a large tree twig. There are two environments navigated in series. One is a dense, obviously digital environment in which it is hard to find your bearings. This world is shiny, abstract and chaotic. The other is a very different immersive environment, a hostile pseudo-natural world in dark, yet seemingly phosphorescent color. The navigator gets lost in a mass of foliage. Many of the normal activities of gameplay are stripped away. The result is a contemplative if deliberately bewildering experience, a “dream architecture” in which divisions break down. Even the “borders between light and structure start to become […]

Figures 2 and 3. Joyce Hinterding and David Haines—stills from *Purple Rain* (2004). Live sound and triggered Digital video, custom built electronics, VHF and UHF antenna, software-based video playback system. Photos: Michael Myers. © Haines/Hinterding.

Figure 4. David Haines and Joyce Hinterding: *Electromagnetique Composition for Building, Plants and Stars* (2007). Installation with site-specific live and recorded sound HD video projection. Photo: Michael Myers. © Haines/Hinterding.
ambigious.” There is no real escape, no finish, no complete aim or objective.

In such work, the technical world—both old (analog) and new (digital)—is returned to the world at large. There is no longer a bifurcation between technics and non-technics or, to put this differently, “artificial” and “natural” technics, “artificial” and “natural” signal or electricity. All these are mutually transformed. Here, all signal can be (and is) processed by all other signals. This gives us a different understanding of the situatedness not only of media art, but all media events. The works enact an understanding of media in which “world”—here multiple worlds—becomes a heterogeneous medium for the “vector transmission” of feeling. I will briefly tease this out via A.N. Whitehead’s process philosophy.

Whitehead presents a little remarked upon but comprehensive “media theory” that resituates media in the world (that is, media events are not “bifurcated” from the rest of the world, in for example a “signal [medium] versus noise [world]” configuration). More dramatically, Whitehead writes of the entire “world as medium.” Whitehead’s philosophy here pre-empt significant aspects of McLuhan’s media theory. The medium is the message indeed, but the medium is also the world. So the very complex signal mixing that is world is the message. In Whitehead’s media philosophy, there is no “bifurcation” between different types of signal (technical or natural, for example). It is all world(s) as medium. All the world is not a stage, as Shakespeare remarked. It is rather signal processing. Within this, individual signals (themselves a mix of previously formed signals) become “vectors of transmission” for the feeling that is central to his process philosophy. Signals gather other signals. They form vectors of transmission that are felt, or that we might say are feelings in and of themselves (“prehensions” in Whitehead’s terms). They come together in a kind of “satisfaction,” as “actual occasions,” then they fall away, although they might be gathered again in the process by new events. In a similar manner to McLuhan (who read Whitehead extensively), Whitehead understands “the human body” within the world as medium as a kind of signal transducer or modulator. The body is “a complex ‘amplifier’—to use the language of the technology of electromagnetism.” Furthermore (and this is perhaps the basis for McLuhan’s later understanding of the shifting ratios of senses emphasized by different media), for Whitehead “the predominant basis of perception is perception of the various bodily organs, as passing on their experiences by channels of transmission and of enhancement.”

Whitehead’s philosophy helps us understand how, in Hinterding and Haines’ signal-work, electronic technologies can be caught up in the world of ancient or cosmic technical forces. These older/larger forces are also, of course, themselves transformed by the electronic. It is cross-signal processing writ large—at the level of world. Following from this we can say that Hinterding and Haines’ work is profoundly “ecological,” in at least two senses. First, they are obviously very aware of the “natural” environment—or better, world—as context for events. However, their work is also “ecological” in a slightly different way. The work is also “ecological” in that it emphasizes relations and whole system transformations. For example, just as the relations within a entire rainforest are generally dependent upon rain, and transformed by specific events of rainfall, so too, in Hinterdings and Haines’ Purple Rain, are the relations and events generally dependent upon, and transformed by, the specific events of television signal that “fall” upon the installation. The transversal forces and transformations within and between different dynamic systems becomes the very substance of the work. As such, their work creates signal events or signal fields that are ecologically plural and mixed—between, for example, social ecologies, ecologies of sensation, J.J. Gibson’s “ecology of perception,” Isabelle Stengers’ “ecologies of practice,” or media ecologies. In this Hinterding and Haines’ work resonates with something like Gregory Bateson’s “ecology of mind.” For Bateson, three signal-fields are intertwined, as “cybernetic or homeostatic systems: the individual human organism, the human society, and the larger ecosystem.” Their work also resonates with Félix Guattari’s more recent “three ecologies”—of self, socius, and environment—that develop Bateson’s thinking. However, Guattari’s three ecologies are really at least six ecologies. All three have two aspects. They have an actual aspect (what is actually there, if constantly becoming something else) and a virtual aspect (the shifting if unperceivable “relational potential,” from which the ongoing
transformation of the actual draws and to which it returns). A very rough example might be the way in which the changing weather actualizes climate. Although here the virtuality of the latter—climate—could not necessarily be equated to “climate” per se, that is, as we know and measure it. Rather it would be that from which all the potential relations and events that come to be “climate” (and subsequently, weather) arise. This would certainly include the deeper virtuality of potential relations created by the weather of the past. Yet, as per Guattari’s three ecologies, it would also include potential relations within and with: other aspects of the environment per se (oceans, cosmic forces, geological factors, ice and snow, etc); technical and social forces (agriculture, mining, government policies, the media’s relation with science); and also the thinking and acting of individual living beings—including but not only human beings. For human beings this might include climate change denial, belief in the concept of permanent “economic growth,” or living sustainably, etc. Haines and Hinterding’s work is profoundly “ecological” in all these senses. Indeed, the open relational potential they structure into their work makes any ecology hard to consider in isolation. Within this inter-ecological transversality, sense—even a sense of the ecological itself—shifts as signals meet and are mutually transformed. Ecology is everywhere in the work, yet difficult to pin down. Signal is at the heart of this. Yet the work reveals signal itself as a series of transversal, field, or (inter)ecological events.

Signal is perhaps always cross-signal processing at the level of world.

In sum, if Hinterding and Haines’ works more than hint at a more environmentally engaged future, this is of no fully determined kind. Signal here is not about the confirmation of known worlds but about ongoing ecological transformation. In this context, signal does not primarily “carry meaning” or messages (alternatively, we could say that signal seen this way generates an ongoing plenitude of meanings). Neither does signal here support or maintain the integrity of established media forms/events (again, we could say that it generates a plenitude of media events). Rather signal “worlds” or, better, creates “worldings.” In the process, Haines and Hinterding’s reworking of the world as a series of unexpected signal-assemblages transforms what it is to think/feel, because here thinking and feeling belong to new, more open ecologies of sensation.

All this is achieved not only by literal assemblage—a hacking of the technologies involved—but also by what I am calling a hacking of the aesthetic. By this, I mean three related things: first, this hacking opens up the ecology of sensations within experience; second, this hacking questions given models—and crucially syntaxes or orderings of process—within which experience is often conceived; and third, this hacking the aesthetic challenges given political ecologies in so far as these rely on such syntaxes and orders.

First, hacking the aesthetic, in order to open up the ecology of sensations, involves reworking technical relations. This reworking of technical relations is often a matter of rerouting or processing signals of all kinds, and it is this signal-processing that more or less directly opens up the ecology of sensations (Figure 5).

For example, in Hinterding’s Siphon, a simple capacitor is made from scratch, using hundreds of beer glasses coated in carbon. We smell that capacitor as it functions. In another example, Haines and Hinterding’s Purple Rain, live television signal is processed via homemade electronics. These include a digital random event generator (a kind of digital roulette wheel) within a hacked MIDI keyboard. This processed television signal randomly triggers animated videos of mountain avalanches and purple static, differently depending on exactly which television signal is received by antennas in the gallery. Haines suggests that Purple Rain “was hacked everything.” Even its sound field was produced via the cross-processing of visual signal that had been redirected into a sound mixer.

Second, to hack the aesthetic is to question given models via technical reassemblage and signal-work. It opens up the way we feel, think about, model, and therefore work with, the relations between sensation and thinking (relations crucial to any formal philosophy of art and to many arguments over the nature of aesthetic experience). This does not only mean thinking new thoughts or sensing new sensations. Perhaps more importantly, it means tearing up the social/philosophical/political contracts for the ordering of the relations between thought and sensation. In admitting outside forces, such as atmospheric electricity, or television signal, to their artworks,
Haines and Hinterding challenge a certain given-ness in the nature of assemblages (especially but not only in “new media art”), a given-ness often assumed or enforced by social/philosophical/political contract. Their work, therefore, has the potential to challenge, both at macro- and micro-political levels, the very syntax or grammar by which we normally order our experience. Given syntactic orderings (the way that models, rules, or concepts distribute experience across time and space by regulating the concept, and actual flow, of signal transmission) can be reversed or, more radically, redistributed. Hinterding and Haines are the “Gertrude Steins” of the electronic art installation. Theirs is no longer an aesthetic in which, for example, sensation might have to be resolved in the syntactical ordering of the Kantian sublime, in which, after an overwhelming experience, the limits of imagination supposedly give way to the triumph of reason (in a kind of aesthetic cadence to the “complete well-formed aesthetic sentence,” the “grammar” of experience).

Third, hacking the aesthetic challenges given political ecologies in so far as these rely on such syntaxes and orders. It implies that a reassemblage of sensation and thinking involves a broader political ecology. To undo given syntaxes and orders in the relation between sensation and thinking, via signal-work, is a political/environmental act. Crucially, this is a matter of remaking both actual relations, and the future possibility of relations to come. Given orderings and syntaxes are challenged, politically, in two ways. They are first challenged in the overcoming of their particular obstacles, limitations, and affordances. Second, hacking the aesthetic challenges the attempt to delimit ecology qua ecology—in for example, an attempt to bifurcate, even positively, nature (“it,” the outside to the human, objects of perception) and thinking (“us” in process, technics, and perceptions).

Hinterding and Haines’ works provide such challenges because they maintain a consistency of both syntactic disruption and open experience. This allows us to both sense and conceive, in process, new relations within the ecological mix, just as there are new relations within the signal mix. A consequence is that there is not any neat settling into an “interpretation” of Haines and Hinterding’s work. This is perhaps because one’s thinking must constantly expand (and contract) with the dynamic technocosmic-signaletic ecologies of sensation involved. There is often an unboundedness to the sensations involved, perhaps at times a reconfigured and open-ended sublime without resolution in reason. The body (itself as signal-body, as “complex amplifier” in Whitehead’s terms) senses precisely what is moving through/with/as space—that is, signal force.

Figure 5. David Haines and Joyce Hinterding: The Blinds and the Shutters (2001). Four channel synchronized DVD projection with 5:1 Sound. Photo: Haines/Hinterding. © Haines/Hinterding.
As Deleuze and Guattari write, “materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them.”

In sum, although Haines and Hinterding do hack technologies, they hack much more than technologies. Indeed, they “hack everything,” as Haines puts it. This starts, as Hinterding explains, in their work with “Electricity we didn’t make.” From such beginnings their work “hacks” given orders, assemblages, and concepts of all kinds (Figure 6).

All in all, Hinterding and Haines’ work undoes a basic political “will-to-sequence,”—a political desire to order the elements of events as they occur, so that they are reduced into a limited and repeatable “making sense.” This undoing is performed in Hinterding and Haines’ signal-work.

Figure 6. Joyce Hinterding: Siphon (1991). Sculpture; specially constructed glass capacitors. Photo: Ian Hobbs. © Joyce Hinterding.
in favor of an unending, open redistribution or reassemblage. In the video work *House II* (2003), for example, an endless torrent of water pours unceasingly through a large house. In *The Blinds and the Shutters*, the contents of a decidedly modernist house slowly disarrange, float out of the windows, through the forest, and into the stratosphere. Such works render invisible forces perceivable. Again, the works are political precisely in that the forces they gather together and redistribute challenge or even at times pull apart the established or “foundational” ordering of the political. In the process signal itself, often unthought and invisible, is felt as it is redirected.

What signal can do (not just “what a body can do,” and here, I will note that a body is signal as much as signal makes up bodies) is rethought. The works follow the traces of massive and complex virtualities—complexes of relational potential—without necessarily returning them to a given frame or sequencing.

It is no surprise then that Haines and Hinterding’s work is full of paradoxical cadences that do not stop or resolve. This accounts for the strange moods of, for example, *Purple Rain* and *House II*. Hinterding says “in both it’s an event that has no beginning, no end and it can’t be stopped and there are strange kinds of nuances in it […] but essentially it is one that cannot be interrupted.” The forces involved neither resolve nor exhaust distribution. The paradoxical stasis of flow in *House II* is uncanny, as is the exaggeration of seeming entropy in *The Blinds and the Shutters*, in which the orbit suggest no final entropy or complete dissipation. If there is a kind of resolution this is of the engagement of flow and distribution as eternal return, in signal terms as loop. This can create a kind of peaceful contemplation (Figure 7).

This is often a contemplation that celebrates contrast. In Haines’ two channel video installation, *The Seventeenth Century* (2002), huge clouds of billowing gold smoke on one screen are juxtaposed with time-lapse photography of a city at night on another screen. The affect involved is distributed differentially—crossing between the screens in an interference of chaotic smoke with urban order and vice versa. The glorious gold clouds of differentiation itself differencing—interferes with an urban order that shifts only ever so slightly in time. It is as if the city is both indifferent to and infused by the differentiating gold mass next to it. It demands explanation, yet there is no story. As Anne Finegan remarks:

In Haines’ cinema of immanence there’s no unconscious to be dredged. No narrative, no signifiers […] rather shifts of intensities pertaining to states […]. There’s […] a Deleuzian geology in which the relation is
not even one of thing-to-thing, but rather one of surfaces or planes, and speeds and differential flows [...].

In many of Hinterding and Haines’ works, there is a series of loops between break and connection, distribution, and assemblage. In this and other ways, they perform what I call a “differential tech-nics” and a “differential aesthetics.”

The term “differential” should be understood here in generative terms. “Differential” does not only mean considering already existing differences or allowing everybody to be different. More than this, the differential is a matter of active or intensive difference (which is precisely what signal is in the end). Differentiation is ongoing. Differentiation is also relational, and differential relations (tensions or contrasts) come first (and last). Differentiation makes up the substance of the subsequent individuations we call experience, life, artworks, and so on, with any instance of these always folding back into ongoing series of intensive differentials. The differential thus refers to active difference as the ungrounding of being—and perhaps the basic milieu of any aesthetic. As Anna Munster notes, this differential milieu comes to the fore in informational art and digital culture. She suggests that “Information itself becomes a differential space for the collision of different worlds [...]. differential relations are foregrounded in embodied experience.”

Foregrounded differential events—and their technical assemblages—locate creative organization ambiguously. In the work performed by live television signal in Purple Rain, for example, Hinterding remarks that “the live interrupts itself, it collapses and comes back again.” “Life” here is found in the assemblage of non-organic elements, which may just occasionally allow the organic to be swept up in such assemblage (Figure 8).

Such differential assemblage is of course very open to otherness—and not just that of the human other. Haines discusses Purple Rain (to reiterate,
A. Murphie

a work in which live television signal was used to assemble sound and image) in the following terms: “I like its otherness even to us. It’s always producing. In New Zealand where we did a lot of the development it sounded really melodic. In Sao Paulo, with lots more antennas, it [sounded] quite Techno. It had quite a percussive […] base to it.” The original aim was to make it even more open: “we wanted to use [a] VLF antenna to [pick up] the background noise of the Milky Way—[from which we would] create this colour field abstraction.” In Purple Rain as elsewhere, representation is often subsumed into an experience of, or play with, the differential forces of signal. There are many possible events that can be triggered, and in most of these, representation falls back into signal. A possibly accidentally formed face may appear—but only faintly and briefly—between more frequent videos of purple static or “rain.” Even the seemingly inevitable progress of the digitally rendered animations of avalanches are interrupted by random signal shifts. The sounds that one hears—and feels—are quite literally those of transduction—the signal transformation of forces.

Such works pose questions concerning the signal tensions or differentials between sound and image, digital and analog, representation and the as-signifying force of the aesthetic. One feels these questions in the space. Is the sound producing the image? Is the image producing the sound? We feel the tensions involved because, again, the work is hacking itself at every moment. Is the image producing the sound? We feel the tensions involved because, again, the work is hacking itself at every moment. Hinterding comments that with the “hacked keyboard […] the three sounds you’re hearing are coming off the video image—we’re getting frame rate […] and we’re getting vertical sync and we’re getting luminance which is the volume changes.”

For her, the “fundamental thing” is that a signal is always an ongoing differentiation of a field, or a conversion between fields.

[…] a sound is going to be translated into electricity […] the constitution of a television image is also a sound wave that is converted into electricity. That sparks a cathode ray that produces an image […] it’s all recycling a signal […] often what we’ve done is reverse the signal paths.

Yet here and elsewhere, something more than the signal paths are reversed. Sometimes it seems that the whole path-world-ordering of the human is “reversed”—turned back toward our inclusion in an outside (Figure 9).

Here, we can think once again of The Blinds and the Shutters, its household objects that return to the virtual ecology from which they must have come, but which we so often do not care to remember. It is an enormous movement, but there is no hurry. The drift toward the virtual seems to sweep you up slowly but totally.

To “reverse signal paths,” as Haines and Hinterding so often do, is again to possibly pull apart the syntax of given aesthetics. It is also to shift the rhythms of distribution in relations, toward what Hinterding calls an “encounter,” via what is often a “fairly reduced environment,” with “something on the outside.” Haines remarks that this is not so much a matter of communication. Rather “all these works are transmitters rather than communicators.” Even “as human beings we’re also transmitters and that goes beyond speech and even beyond language […] and that’s where the sensation field is a transmission space” (Figure 10).

In Hinterding and Haines’ work this transmission space also involves a rhythmic interweaving: of the audio and the visual; of the spaces; of the different kinds of waves—electronic and sea waves, for example, in the rhythmic floating of the tree branches in The Levitation Grounds. For Haines, “it’s like you’re just riffing with different time frames […] it’s like all the time compressions are available, and then you’ve got a choreography of time available to you and this is another good, invisible material […] the virtual of time.” These multiple time frames—the rhythms within and between them—perhaps account for the feeling of being in several places at once. Hinterding notes that in The Blinds and the Shutters, “you are both standing in front of the house and in outer space […] as well as listening to all the magnetic fields [recorded] inside the [the artists’] house.”

For Hinterding, the ongoing reconstitution of such strangely multiple experiences via work with signaletic fields is potentially endless. When signals of all kinds are explored, there is a “weird kind of revelation” in which the artists “keep finding more and more” sounds. For example they “start listening in on the broadcast television signal” or to “sounds from […] polar orbiting satellites.” There are all “these strange kinds of
forces that we are inside of and outside of at the same time.”

In the midst of these strange forces, a systematic or ecological transformation is possible, via the new distribution of rhythms made available by what I have called hacking the aesthetic. Again, this is a felt transformation. Even those forces we take for granted are felt within these transformations, if differently. Hinterding, for example, comments that “we forget how powerful broadcast television is, and how many kilowatts of power are coming through the air […] media images come to us with a literal huge force […] changing the world.” Perhaps very few artists are as aware of this as Hinterding and Haines. To them, the connections between art, media, and politics (and the forces of distribution) involved are often very clear. For example, they were thinking about Purple Rain “around the time that Baghdad was being bombed and you’re thinking it’s all radio signal that’s doing that. And things collapse. You’re disassembling the world even at the level of concrete particles. It is falling down.”

In general, it is perhaps in the hacking of given distributions and signals, and within the “hacking of the aesthetic,” that we might initially situate a politics of the aesthetic (rather than within the question of representations). Thus, again the importance of Hinterding and Haines’s reverse engineering or hacking, of the uncanny visual couplings and transformations, of the fact that, as Hinterding notes concerning Purple Rain, “Everything’s [deliberately] plugged in the wrong way.” Plugging everything in the wrong way makes certain things the more obvious—including the extent to which human, civil distributions are challenged by their fragile vulnerability to their own and outside forces (Figure 11).

The consequences of such open signal-work are many. One is that we feel more fully our ecological partnership with technics. We also perhaps feel that the airwaves interfere with us, bring us rather
Figures 13 and 14. David Haines and Joyce Hinterding: *The Levitation Grounds* (2000–2001). Four-channel DVD video installation, stereo and 5.1 Sound. Photos: Haines/Hinterding. © Haines/Hinterding.

Figure 15. Joyce Hinterding and David Haines: *Two Works for Wilhelm Reich* (2006). High definition projection, live sound, custom built Orgone Energy antennae 4 km. Photo: Haines/Hinterding. © Haines/Hinterding.
too many forces, often freed of their content, while satellites are carrying away our given, familiar ecologies. In works such as House II, with its endless torrents of water, “we” are dispossessed (the “European” is dispossessed) of the powerful metaphors and habits, the sensations/sense of house/home—the “Heimlich,” the aesthetic as return to home.

In The Blinds and the Shutters, this emptying of house and home is of course literal. It is a becoming-satellite. Yet, here, “satellites” do not further our representation of the world. They are no longer the emblem, the very metaphor or literal transport of Heidegger’s “age of the world picture.” Here, the satellite departs from the modern—that age in which we, for the first time, make the world one we think we can picture. Instead, satellites become mysterious unravellers of given sense—they give us sound and image that disrupt our organization of the real. Anne Finegan notes that “Hinterding and Haines haven’t filtered the satellite outputs. They’ve intentionally left the noise and blanks […] Recalibrate the interface and a different set of patterns, with no recognisable shapes, emerges.” Through the signal-work within Haines and Hinterding’s hacking the aesthetic, satellite signals become partakers in new ecologies of distribution. Satellites pull apart the metaphors, the political “magnetic fields” of picture, of control (of new world orders that depend on these metaphors and magnetic fields).

Haines claims that Hinterding’s sensitivity to materials—to perhaps what I have been calling an open signal-work—leads them to the “outside of aesthetics.” When asked about the strong but non-essentialist relation to the natural world in their work, Haines says of Hinterding, “Joyce is letting in all the parts of the world that are unexpected […] she’s like a water diviner.”

What is divined? For one thing, in Hinterding and Haines’ signal-work we perhaps find a signal beyond “technics,” as usually understood. We find it in interecological events that will not stop clamoring for a new sense, even if this will not be given. We find it in sounds or electricity that will not be reconciled to the human. The world is returned, or via signal-work, returns itself, and us with it, to new, open ecologies.

Notes
1. Quotes from Haines and Hinterding are from an interview conducted by me in 2005, unless stated otherwise. Artworks not given individual attribution are by both artists together. Further information/images can be found at the artists’ site at http://www.sunvalleyresearch.net/?p=340. See also Andrew Murphie, “Joyce Hinterding and David Haines: High Res Resonations with the Milky Way”, ACM Computers in Entertainment 7, no. 2 (2009): 1–16.
2. Jane O’Sullivan, “Hinterding Harnesses New York’s Energy”, Australia Art Collector. http://www.artcollector.net.au/HinterdingharnessesNewYorksenergy (accessed February 28, 2011).
3. Kant’s (much challenged) conception of the sublime, for example, is famously “organized,” with a kind of “syntax” (a sequence of events concluding with the triumph of reason over imagination). See also Howard Caygill, “Stelarc and the Chimera: Kant’s critique of prosthetic judgment”, Art Journal 56, no. 1 (1997): 46–51.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, The Concept of Nature (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2009), 26.
5. Art Gallery of New South Wales, David Haines & Joyce Hinterding, Artists—Unguided Tours, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdstMcTGijE (accessed November 10, 2011).
6. Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 284. See http://www.andrewmurphie.org/blog/?p=364 (accessed September 14, 2011).
7. Whitehead, Process and Reality, 40.
8. Whitehead, Process and Reality, 210–11.
9. Whitehead, Process and Reality, 119.
10. On fields, see also Andrew Murphie, “Vibrations in the Air: Performance and Interactive Technics”, Performance Paradigm 1 (2005), http://www.performanceparadigm.net/journal/issue-1/articles/vibrations-in-the-air-performance-and-interactive-technics/ (accessed September 21, 2011) and Christoph Brunner and Jonas Fritsch, “Interactive Environments as Fields of Transduction”, The Fibreculture Journal 18 (2011), http://eighteen.fibreculturejournal.org/2011/10/09/fcj-124-interactive-environments-as-fields-of-transduction/ (accessed November 10, 2011).
11. Gregory Bateson, Steps Towards an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology (London: Intertext, 1972), 446.
12. Félix Guattari. The Three Ecologies (London: Athlone, 2000). See also John Tinnell, “Transversalising the Ecological Turn: Four Components of Félix Guattari’s Ecosophical Perspective”, The Fibreculture Journal 18 (2011), http://eighteen.fibreculturejournal.org/2011/10/09/fcj-121-transversalising-the-ecological-turn-four-components-of-felix-guattari%2099s-ecosophical-perspective/ (accessed November 10, 2011). On “relational potential,” see Brian
A. Murphie

Massumi, “The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens,” Inflexions 1, no. 1 (2008): 13–4.

13. J. James Gibson, The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); Isabelle Stengers, “A ‘Cosmo-Politics’—Risk, Hope, Change”, in Hope: New Philosophies for Change, ed. Mary Zournazi (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2002), 244–72; Matthew Fuller, Media Ecologies. Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

14. Brian Massumi, “Involutionary Afterword: Deleuze, Guattari and the Philosophy of Expression”, Canadian Review of Comparative Literature: Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée 24, no. 3 (1997): 755; Brian Massumi, Parables for the Virtual (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 128–30.

15. McKenzie Wark, A Hacker Manifesto (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

16. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 479.

17. Catherine Lumby and Joyce Hinterding, “Systemic Murmurs”, Art+Text 46 (1993): 48–53.

18. Ann Finegan, The Seventeenth Century of Occultation & Surface (Lawson, Australia: Sun Valley Research, 2002), http://www.sunvalleyresearch.net/?p=610 (accessed April 20, 2010). Finegan notes that in the depiction of waves in The Levitation Grounds, the “potential sublime is dispersed into a scattering. The eye isn’t carried onward and up, but scans the surface and follows the sea through the gap in the wall, to meet and rebound from the waves on the other side.”

19. See also Andrew Murphie, “Electronics: Differential Media and Proliferating, Transient Worlds”, Fineart Forum 17, no. 8 (2003), http://www.andrewmurphie.org/docs/electronicsas.pdf (accessed March 6, 2012); Murphie, “Differential Life, Perception and the Nervous Elements: Whitehead, Bergson and Virno on the Technics of Living”, Culture Machine 7 (2005), http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/32/39 (accessed March 6, 2012).

20. Anna Munster, “Digitality: Approximate Aesthetics”, Ctheory a093 (2001), http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=290 (accessed April 20, 2005).

21. See Ann Finegan, The Levitation Grounds (Lawson, Australia: Sun Valley Research, 2000), http://www.sunvalleyresearch.net/?p=610 (accessed April 20, 2010).Finegan notes that in the depiction of waves in The Levitation Grounds, the “potential sublime is dispersed into a scattering. The eye isn’t carried onward and up, but scans the surface and follows the sea through the gap in the wall, to meet and rebound from the waves on the other side.”

22. This political signal-work is perhaps related to but not quite the same as the “distribution of the sensible,” found in Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

23. Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture”, in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, ed. Martin Heidegger (New York: Harper Torch books, 1977).

24. Finegan, The Levitation Grounds.