

# Not a Rock anymore but a World

*Jamie O'Connell interviewed by Bess Davey & Tom Nicholson*

Young artists enrolled in the Fine Arts Honours program are each allocated an advisor or mentor, an artist/lecturer with whom they meet regularly one-to-one to discuss the development and direction of their work. In 2015 six young artists – Preyada Apiwattanatam, Bess Davey, Andrew Duong, Olivia Koh, Natasha Manners, and Jamie O'Connell – were mentored by the artist Tom Nicholson. The following pair of dialogues – the edited transcript of interviews with O'Connell by Nicholson and Davey – is one of six pairs of conversations between two of these young artists and Nicholson. Each dialogue was conducted in relation to a specific work, the first on 15 May, the second on 11 September. These transcribed conversations are an attempt to capture something of the year-long exchange between these young artists and Nicholson, as well as the connections that developed between and across the ideas of the six young artists in this group.

Dialogue 6. Part 1.

This dialogue takes as its starting point O'Connell's work 'Meteor-rite-meteor'. This work developed from and through O'Connell's proposed relaunching of a meteorite back into space. O'Connell's work evolved into a multi-part video work, conceived into a set of disused and ruinous offices on the Caulfield Campus. In part using video as a textual medium – to describe narratives related to his future launching – as well as found footage – some web-based dvi imagery, some historical documentary footage - O'Connell's work became a way to both evoke his proposal and to unpack its ramifications.

Bess Li: Can you begin by talking about the work's title?

Jamie O'Connell: The original title was 'Meteor-rite-meteor', playing upon the linguistic shift from meteor to meteorite, describing the entry of an object into our world. The original idea was to essentially put a meteorite back into space. That original idea, at this point, is absent from these works.

BL Does the idea feature in ways that are not visible?

JO Absolutely. The impulse behind that idea is basically what is being teased apart through all these various forms – that impulse to force something new upon the world, to realise a new territory or an uncharted space. This echoes problematic histories of imperialism and violence, but is also present in any new beginning.

BL When you talk about a meteorite as imposing something new upon the world, do you see that as working both ways: the meteorite returning to space is re-imposing that, back upon where it came from.

JO I am thinking that the transition – the transformation even – that happens to the meteorite is a product not only of classification, but rather more basically one of human investment. So this lump of slag, previously unknown to us, arrives unexpectedly and it is at that point that this linguistic nomination takes place. This is the point of human investment. Think of all the wonder that is tied up in this, in this image of a shooting star: from the saccharine to the portentous. It is a product of belief – and what's more the want to believe – which is a fragile yet potent human characteristic. The idea of the project is to then throw this investment back out into space. It quite literally becomes a seed of humanity, ejected back into space. This is the intent at least.

BL Can you talk a little about why you chose video for this work?

JO The medium of video is in one way a pragmatic decision. A lot of the projects I am now undertaking deal with an absence. They deal with an absent object. They deal with the presence of absence, as contradictory as that sounds. The medium of video is a means by which that can be accessed, a form of documentation that can handle both time and absence. Video can elegantly mediate a connection between presence and absence.

Tom Nicholson: I wanted to follow that line of thinking to begin to tease apart the nature of the four video components in this space. One video seems to be a found documentary from the 50's, perhaps an American propaganda film about military activity, set in an arctic context. It seem to allude to a space that is remote and inaccessible to a wider population, so it does that thing you're talking about. But, it also feels like writing is important too. There are two videos that are primarily subtitles to an absent voice, where writing through video becomes a way to mediate a space that is otherwise remote or inaccessible or absent. The blinking this writing does in the video – as we move from sentence to sentence - is a very particular way for writing to occur, differing from a book, where we determine the pace of our encounter

with the text. Whereas here it is regulated by the pace of the subtitled text. The counterpoint to all this is the blinking that occurs in the periphery of our vision – the video projection at the far end of the space, footage found on the net that shows two boys who dance in a bedroom in front of a bright, flashing light, casting a pulsating shadow dance on the wall behind them. This is the only wordless component of the work, where image makes its own syntax. A very long preamble to ask: how do you see writing in relation to video?

JO I find myself engaging with the video work almost willfully against conventional film logic. The lack of visual imagery forgoes one of the primary allures of a video document. I try to summon that allure via writing. The subtitles, with their implied voice, construct within the text deliberate gaps between form and content, which works to echo the gap between presence and absence.

BL Is language something that is important to you practice more broadly?

JO Yes it is. I find many of my projects are launched from a phrase or word play: playing with the way that words attempt to hook onto the world. I have a want to keep my work in a particular sort of vernacular, so there is a linguistic element to that, also.

TN What vernacular is that?

JO It's a common vernacular, drawn largely from pop-culture. If inspiration is drawn from a twee or cringe-worthy source, I don't try to hide that from view. It is part of the generative process.

BL I guess I'm interested in going back a little bit to talking about language – this sense of gradually abstracting language, moving from the semeiotic sign and slowly dissolving these structures, abstracting it into a form that is digestible in another way, outside of language.

JO Language works on an incredible torsion between words and things, and an inability for words to fully latch onto things. There is an amazing energy at play in that gap. Part of my project is always to work with this dissonance or estrangement. I want to take this common vernacular, working with these things that retain their specificity and try to, in some way through the work, estrange our understanding of these things, to jolt them out of our preconceived notions and norms. I think there is something very valuable, perhaps even ethical, in showing ideas to be strange unto themselves.

TN One of the things that is very strong, in the two text-based videos and in the Arctic documentary video in particular, is the way that matter is conjured: the way they describe stuff, what stuff is and means, particularly in relation to us as humans. That is present in the amazing events that are documented in that American found footage. It's also present in this text-based video, this history of the four meteorites – The Tent, the Man, the Woman and the Dog – where you detail the use of this matter which comes from the sky by indigenous people. There is an insistent sense of stuff and how our bodies relate to it, like the way in the text-based video you describe "shovel shaped teeth", which makes links between the tools we would fashion from stuff and what our bodies are and do. That feels quite recurrent – but the work is all video, so in a sense the material presence of the work is electronic. Can you talk a little about this relationship between the means of the work and the physicality or materiality that is a recurrent spectre in it?

JO That materiality is counterpointed by language, which is a metaphysically presence, to use this description in a strict sense. This is at the core of what I am trying to do, to explore the way these elements interrelate, a relationship which might be historically describe as the relationship between the sacred and the profane. I believe the logic of this relationship, or rather the metaphysics through which we understand this relationship, still marks the way we understand what it is to be in the world. Then again that engagement is with the gap: to have this material presences mediated through almost a virtual medium. Such a gap is an implicitly generative thing, as one has to mobilise the imagination in order to suture it.

TN That space you are talking about – that gap – how do you see that space that opens up, where words and things would be prised apart or disorganised, in relation to the other space that is referred to in the work, which is either celestial space or Arctic space, these spaces which we don't know?

JO That idea of the uncharted, this aporia or this lack of knowledge, is fundamental to the work. It becomes the site of emergence – and a means to mobilise the imagination. On the other hand, the thing that I am trying to tease apart is that such unknowability – such that exists in these incredibly remote spaces such as Arctic or celestial space – can also be recognised in our everyday being, in language and in our seemingly banal relation to the world. This same gap can open up within the familiar and the present.

BL Could you talk a little bit about that in relation to the space in which the work is now. It's a large disused space. It looks like a common room, with a lot of broken furniture and detritus on the ground. There are cables hanging out of the roof. There is dim lighting. It's kind of as if this building were about to be knocked down.

- JO But it is located in the larger fabric of this institution, it's like the failed kernel at the heart of the structure.
- TN It's a very big space too. It was 'e-solutions', so it's also very full of the detritus of computers. But then weirdly when you look out the window it's the space I see every time I come to Monash, the outside tables of the first-floor cafeteria. So it's like a weird parallel universe that exists right beside where we all normally pass our days. Even the clocks have stopped, which for me is very present because the videos are running. Everything else feels like it has stopped. Something crashed through this building and no one has survived; except for bad Monash office furniture. How did this space structure the generation of the work and what does it mean for the way it reads?
- JO The space became very useful for me to began to articulate this more splintered or diffuse way of presenting work, which is at odds with how I have previously worked. So the space actually became a type of gap – a non-space. It no longer seems to have a purpose but retains these tantalising traces. This became a site where I could begin to tease apart the bigger idea and actually begin to locate it concretely, with positions and localities that could be traversed and encountered with a sense of duration. Prior to having this space this is something I was trying to articulate strictly through video, which for my purposes was proving problematic. The single aperture seemed to limit what I was attempting. Being able to engage with the space allowed the work to be effectively teased apart. Then the actual space itself resonates for me with a lot of the content that I am toying with in these video works, these temporal dislocations. These things exist in and out of tune with our current time and periodically collapse into our current time.
- TN How does its ruinous character sit with the work? This sense that the space is the aftermath of something, how does that sit with the videos?
- JO The videos deal with these knowledge-based impulses to improve upon the world and to build something within the world. And always to some extent these things come to ruin: this video in the front space that documents this American cold-war-era military base that was nuclear powered and buried in the icecap under Greenland, which now sits as this defunct reactor somewhere still under the icecap. These things have these utopic ambitions that ultimately collapse. And from this a certain energy is generated, that persists. This is precisely the sort of energy with which this space is charged; the ruinous nature of these spaces echoes this.
- TN What are the different voices in the work? There's a mass of chairs behind you that suggests a mass of people gone awry, or vaporized. So there is a polyphonic thing implied in the space as we are aware of the residues of many bodies. But it also feels like there are different voices that are conjured in the work itself. There is literally that voice of the narrator in the cold war American film, then there are these two texts which suggest an absent voice. What are those different voices, and what happens between them?
- JO The voices come from either found documents, as is the case with the cold war video in the front room, or historical archive or alternatively my own responses to these things. I don't try to conflate them and remove the contradictions between them by recourse to a single voice, as expressed by the artist. Those conflicting or different voices remain discrete within the space, leaving the viewer to thread through these voices, a way of keeping active in here the process of forming.
- TN What do you think is assembled in us in the way we thread together those voices? In terms of how those voices are brought into relation to one another, what constitutes itself?
- JO It was an intentional thing to condense and overlap the various voices. I didn't want you to be able to encounter any one voice in particular and at a particular time. The intent was to establish these coordinates that you are located between. To encounter one is to encounter the other. That dynamic becomes this conjuring of different narratives. These voices are wedged into the front of the space, next to this cluster of chairs. So there's this very dense intermingling of voices at the front of the space when you come in. When you sit in this space, in which they are almost intelligible together and you try and find ways to watch them or to be with them together, there is this other thing at the very far end of the space, which is this wordless thing, that flashes at you – which is very much the language of shadows. It literally is the flashing on and off of still images, of two boys making shadows on a bedroom wall. This creates dark and light moments within the patterning of the video itself. Then when you try and watch the work you have to peer through the window into that office space in an obscured or incomplete way, or you stand in the door to see all of it, at which point your own shadow comes to be projected into the work. So there is a very particular structuring of the work with this compression of languages and voices at the entrance to the space, a kind of clogging – then at the far end of the space is this thing that persistently flashes at you. So you have this clog of language and voices at the entrance of the work and then at the other end to have this blinking piece, where the voice in a literal sense is absent.
- TN A moment that I think I really important in this work is when you stand at that end of the space and look out and see a site that is very familiar through these windows. The everydayness of that actually leaks into the space in a certain way. In the encounter that then becomes another screen that we regard as we contemplate what the work is and does. What do you think that moment is and does in the work, this leakage to the outside?

JO This leakage is a kind of aneurysm between fact and fancy. This is a crucial point in the work, I see it as the moment that all the other forms can coalesce. It is also the point in which the present intercedes and becomes part of this fusion. While the other forms deal with events at various distances from the time they occurred, this view shares the same space and time as our own bodies. As such, our present moment is drawn into this process of figuring, and perhaps disorganised in the process.

TN This really overlaps with a lot of the things you have talked about but it feels like maybe a good last question to pose: you used the phrase 'an uncharted space or territory'. There is a legitimate sense that, as artists, the zone we want to work in and be in and articulate is an uncharted space. Our forming may then yield things we don't know, and our forming may disorganise the way we see the world, and will do the same for others. It feels like that is a really important part of what we inherit from 20th-century art. 'Uncharted territory' is also a phrase evocative of our colonial and imperial history, in which the idea of uncharted waters was a language by which we could be blind to the way those territories were already inhabited and known and named and lived in. Your work is engaged in both these senses of uncharted territories. The narratives described in the work are narratives of European colonial exploration. But, there is also a sense of language being dissembled, and a new territory being enacted here through the work. How do you see those two uncharted territories in relation to one another and those two ways of being that are implied by those uncharted territories?

JO The counterpointing of these two forms of territories is to show how one taints the other, to show how these histories are not something that that howls from the distance. Rather, the present is shot through with these histories of both triumph and atrocity, which mark us and move with us, recognised in our way of being in the world. This is to at once hold to the allusive goal of progress while recognising in the inherent violence of such ambitions.

TN Does that produce or describe a type of impasse, or does it aim to be another way of imagining progress?

JO Definitely the latter. I have no intention to create an impasse. In fact I would describe the ambition of my practice as an attempt to work beyond such impasses.

## Dialogue 6. Part 2.

This dialogue takes as its starting point a second iteration of O'Connell's work 'Meteor-rite-meteor'. Developing the logic of the work presented for discussion in May, O'Connell presented a complex of video works, this time articulated into a disused set of science laboratories on the fourth floor of Building F, above MUMA, the same site as his Graduate Exhibition work. Including some video elements present in the earlier iteration, this work also included a short loop of footage of a meteorite fragment filmed by the artist at Monash's electro-magnetic microscope laboratory at Clayton. The final room of the work presents a panoramic view of the suburb around Monash, the horizon line of Caulfield set against a video filmed by O'Connell: the sparks created by dragging a meteorite fragment from the back of the artist's truck, filmed at night, creating an uncontrolled 'drawing' evocation of a night sky in formation.

BL To start with could you tell us a little bit about the space? I still can't quite figure out what this space was used for in the past.

JO The space used to be a particle research laboratory. It has been largely evacuated now, but what remains are all the extraction hoods, gas lines and fittings. It has an unusual layout, in that there is two central rooms around which four other laboratory spaces are constructed. All the outer spaces have vantages to the outside world, but the central rooms are largely cut off. These spaces are then criss-crossed by doors, creating a slightly labyrinthine sort of layout. I have tried to use the strange choreography of the space as a means to formulate the various components of the work.

BL I'm interested in the objects that are still here as well. What is this machine next to where we are sitting?

JO To the best of my knowledge it is for particle analysis, which serves the project fantastically. What is dealt with here, in part, is the forming and un-forming of matter, at various scales and distances from such events.

TN It also feels like as well as drawing attention to matter and the way things form, it draws attention to our eyes and ways of seeing. Not just this piece of equipment but also this emergency eye wash sign over there, with its weird graphic – it's hard to tell if it's a washing instruction or a figure having a very teary moment. Likewise, all these vents and ducts allude to a damaging vapour that might be in the

air.

JO These also suggest a type of respiration, through the space. The space is set up so the central room that you navigate to has the shortest video of the install: which is basically a one second loop. This footage is in fact a incredibly close-up partial image of a meteorite surface - of particles even.

BL This imagery looks like it could have been made on a machine very much like this one in the space.

JO It was, in fact. But the motion of this image, operates, in some capacity at least, as a kind of respiration – as an animating aspect of the space, like a heart beating. So it sets up these rhythms and relationships. It is also an accelerated pace; it's not a comfortable pace. It has an unsettling urgency to it.

BL How would you connect that to this video in this room, which has some people dancing, with a similar rhythm and pace, boys dancing in front of a bright, flashing light that casts their shadows on the wall of the bedroom behind them.

JO I think what has really started to present itself across all the videos is the importance of rhythms and durations and time. The video of the boys dancing becomes one articulation of this, yet there are other elements to it. It's not exhausted by this. For instance, that one second loop is faced off by the longest video in the install, with a duration of around 40 minutes. So you have these two different durations, with their own pace and tone. Then the strobe light has a different pacing, then the pacing of the text-based video at the entrance is itself a type of flashing. This is further augmented by a tremor of the video itself – which creates another strobing effect. Then there is the flashing of this spark video. You get many different instances of duration and time, and what it sets up is these disequilibriums of time.

BL I'm interested in the combination of found footage, manipulated footage but also footage that you have filmed. How does this operate in the work?

JO This has been an on-going discussion throughout the year. One of the central principles of what I am doing is around this idea of beginning, creating something new. The found footage was a good way to enter into imaging the project, but it always seemed necessary for the ethos of the project to actually produce and generate my own way of imaging this act, within the work. To talk again of this disequilibrium of time, the found footage sets up a distance. It is in some sense archival. It already exists. This is then counterpointed by these documents that have been produced specifically for the project. The experience of viewing is at many distances from the event. There is a strata of historical moments set up between the archive and the present through these documents.

This is present too in the text-based video, drawn from archived journals of polar explorers. These explorers encountered this aural history and this historical narrative that surrounds these particular meteorites in Greenland. That then becomes the counterpoint to the novel part of the project, the part that I am enacting, ejecting the meteorite back out into space.

BL Could you explain that a bit more: is this a new part of the project?

JO The original impulse for the project was based around this linguistic play between meteorite and meteor – meteor being out in space and a meteorite being terrestrially associated. This happens in this burn as it enters the world's atmosphere, in which it transitions from a meteor to a meteorite. So this linguistic play is to flip this again, making the meteorite back into a meteor. Of course there are profound material challenges in this simple linguistic reversal, but this reversal has been the subject of the project since the beginning. This becomes a gesture of a beginning, essentially. In this install that has become prominent again, in both the architecture and the experience of the install. It is inserted modestly, as simply a notation and a single image. This image has formal associations with the imagery produced via the electron microscope, which is actually a partial image of the surface of the meteorite, and this association hints at the links between the two. That part of the project is now present again as part of this overall score of the work. It exists here as a projected event: the launch set to take place in 2016, so we have these different temporalities set up – here it's a promise of the future.

TN Can you talk a bit about how the material here evokes that action, specifically through these two spaces that are very recurrent: one being the nocturnal, the other being polar? These are also two spaces where seeing, or straining to see, is exacerbated.

JO That's been this persistent problem, a good problem: how to manifest this absence, which is the substance of this work. The subject of the work is this meteorite that is to be ejected into space, so the problem becomes: how do you conjure that thing and its associations back up through forms of image-making and writing. The evocation of the unknown has long been linked with these sites in the tradition of northern Romanticism: there is nothing more familiar to this genre than a tale of a failed arctic exploration, set against twilight - the space of dreaming. This particular polar site, Thule, in Greenland, where these meteorites fell, was the launching point for all the pioneering attempts to reach the north pole. So we have this linking of an incredibly distant story of an anachronistic iron age delivered from space, in

the form of these meteorites, used by the people of the time to fashion weapons and tools 400 years before terrestrial iron arrived with the iron age. And the pursuit of the north pole, which was the space race of its time. There is quite an incredible photo that is one of the few images that exists of these polar explorations. The image is of Cook, who claims to be the first to reach the pole: what we see is this scene of white desolation with these two spectral figures standing either side of the image like a 6-10 split, they're impossible to identify, like shadows in a field of light. Hanging in the air between them as if falling, without any clear idea of how it is suspended or tethered there, is the American flag. Everything else is whited out by the conditions. It's a very evocative image, one of seeing coupled with blindness - this is like the delirious space that gets evoked in the journals. Some of this writing here in the text-based video is taken from Cook's journals, and the way it is written, this first-hand account, is slightly intoxicating. It's an on-rush. It's a race to arrive, through this white blindness that he talks about in the journals. All in the pursuit of the pole, in a similar way to the space race. So you have this nodal point that links the space of the meteorites, as aural history, that is brought to the attention of modernity through the pursuit of the pole - it is in this pursuit that these cultures crossed. So this delirium and this image-making has become a way to evoke this absence, which is the central thing.

BL In other work you have also included pop cultural references, things that are very present now, but will disappear in 5 years because no one will watch that TV program anymore. Has that been a part of your thinking in this project?

JO Absolutely. It has actually been something I have been trying to re-incorporate - and it does fold back in to some extent. This video for instance, which is a rough of a longer video to be made, is a way of reanimating the meteorite, but doing it in a very rudimentary way. What we see here is a meteorite dragged by a strap behind a car. It is a perfunctory, at-hand way of reanimating this object - it is not dissimilar in quality from many videos you might see on youtube. At times it's a spark that becomes quite ethereal and strange to look at. At other times, passing through street lights for instance, it is revealed to be what it is - a object dragged across the earth by a car. A similar quality can be seen with the video of boys dancing, you can see occasionally that one of them is wearing a Star Wars T-shirt. This Camp Century video is also a product of popular culture, but one far-removed.

TN As a coda to that question, I think you mentioned the originating impulse of the work as a kind of making new, in releasing that rock back into space. That loosely correlates with the desire to chart or discover unknown space, which has long set of antecedents in our culture - but also an echo of that vanguard desire to make the world anew by shaping something anew. On the other hand, the work is very much lodged within language as an existing architecture, even the originating impulse has this language play between meteorite and meteor. Language itself is also central to what animates this space, in that the first thing we encounter is a text, in that new subtitle-based video. Can you talk a little bit about this? There is a bounded-ness in language which is part of the richness of what the work deals with.

JO To set those things up as oppositions is precisely what I'm not trying to do. The way this work attempts to operate is to examine language and this functioning of reason. What I am interested in, is trying to reanimate or re-vivify a faith in reason. But not to set reason against imagination or more libidinal impulses that effect a kind of sabotage or subterfuge of reason, but to look at the way that imagination feeds reason and in turn reason can then re-scribe the limits of imagination. Rather than one opposed to the other or existing in a bind, it becomes a kind of locomotion of reversals and expansion that happens between these two properties. In the imagery and the content there is something very promethean going on in this project. It is based around this fire.

TN Or Icarus.

JO Exactly! It is not to down play the risks of this brand of thinking. Icarus is a useful analogy. Things didn't end well for Prometheus either. It's that ambition to reanimate; reanimation is primarily what is going on in this project. Everything here is a form of animation. It's a story of how things are set in motion. There is something ritualistic in this video of the meteorite being dragged that serves to reanimate the formative passage of the meteorite through a kind of fire. What I am trying to do here is revivify the idea that knowledge can be subversive.

TN I agree that it is a false binary to set up, but part of what is interesting here for me is that there are oblique allusions to modernism and modernity in the work. And it is part of the rich heritage from modernism that what artists fashion are interruptions to the world.. I feel like that is complexly at play in the work, but so is the space opened up by words at times by words alone, but also wordlessness. What is strong about that one-second loop video - from the electro-magnetic microscope lab - is its distinct wordlessness. At the same time it very strongly alludes to the space of a mouth repeatedly opening

JO A thing worth saying is that I hold to that legacy of the enlightenment. One of the greatest epistemic virtues of the enlightenment was to affirm this disequilibrium of time that I'm talking about. To affirm this is to also hold to the idea of some sort of cognitive progress. What I am interested here in addressing in our contemporary moment is this sentiment that dismisses progress as in and of itself a dangerously totalitarian idea. There are historically contingent things that make this a very real concern, but we shouldn't allow ourselves to be governed by sentiment. These aspects of modernism are put to work here, but then this element of wordlessness comes in as a means for imagination to impregnate reason. It becomes this productive back and forwards between things that expand one another, and check

one another. This wordlessness becomes the instance where being exceeds naming, allowing a disruptive interplay between language and matter, the stuff of which the world and we ourselves are comprised. The mouth becomes a crucial nexus point for this reason, as it is both the site of enunciation and also a means for biting.

BL The spaces you have chosen for both last semester and this semester seem to echo the idea that utopic thinking tends to end in a ruinous state. There is the desire to launch the meteorite back into space yet we are surrounded by this ruinous environment. Can you talk a bit about that relationship?

JO This comes back to this idea of re-animating: animating in the sense of the sort of animation that exists in these videos, but also re-animating in the sense of resurrecting something. So while these sites are a testament to that dystopic failure you alluded to, the role is then to intervene in these spaces and to perform this kind of resurrection of something that I hold to be fundamentally important.

BL I see that clearly in your use of text, and digital forms. But I'm interested in your encounter with material form in this project.

JO The meteorite drag video is a very material encounter, in which an actual meteorite has been dragged behind a car. This echoes the story in the new subtitle-based video: the account of the knife in Greenland being made using the meteor. Yet here, rather than using a stone to grind the edge, I have used the world.

TN At the moment the presence of meteorite itself is quite spectral. At the moment, what do you think that absence is filled by physically? Sitting in this room, it's hard not to think that it is the horizon.

JO In some sense everything in here begins to operate as a kind of surrogate, and our bodies and bodily cavities beginning to become a kind of a surrogate for the meteorite. This is something we have discussed throughout the development of this project: those material substitutes that enter the work. The way that one second loop becomes like the palette of the mouth or an eye socket or cave or cavities of some sort. The meteorite drag video, which reanimates the meteorite by using the earth as a grindstone serves in some way to draw the world itself in as a player in this orchestration. Framing the screen upon which this video of the dragged meteorite is played is a bay of windows that look out to this very flat Melbourne horizon. And of course in a way this whole work is about horizons: both literally, with this physical horizon, and figuratively as a horizon of human creativity, limitation and potential, over which is an undetermined future.

TN Can you talk a little bit about the cave and interior spaces? I guess what the project entails, in part, is for that little rock to be sent out into a space where there is no horizon, only sky. Then paradoxically a lot of the content here deals with an interior space: like the way that electron microscopy turns a rock into a cave, and then this image of the boys appear in a darkened bedroom space – which alludes very strongly to various platonic dimensions and what a cave is, as a kind of unreliable reflection of what the world is outside. Can you talk a bit about that, both in how the work has evolved, but also about what a cave is in terms of what images do?

JO It's a fundamental dialogue between these two localities. This inner space of the cave sets up a history and duration. You have this idea of the platonic cave enacted through the video of the boys strobe-light dancing inside a bedroom and projecting shadows. You become imbricated in this too, as by viewing the work you are made to also project similar shadows. This is set against an extreme alternative: a thing existing without horizons, a most utter, outer space. At the risk of over simplifying it, what sets this up is modernity, shaped by enlightenment thinking, and its mythical and constitutive other, the mind in a cave. The cave is coded as this scene of natality: the emergence from which is the birth of modernity, set against our lesser selves. This is of course mythical. What I am dealing with is precisely the promiscuity of form, form as a time traveller. Form that structures the present – the way the past doesn't generate things, rather things generate the past, from within the present.

There is a line that I could draw between these two extremities, of inner and outer space, that passes through Hanna Arendt. Arendt describes space as site through which we could escape out earthly bind, for Arendt the earth represented the part of ourselves that we had not created, our nature as such. In leaving earth we chance then to leave behind our nature – you can imagine why Arendt would be interested in such potential. This project explores that potential, but also its inherent failings.