

ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES ARCHIVE BALNAVES FOUNDATION AUSTRALIAN SCULPTURE ARCHIVE PROJECT

Interview with Peter Kennedy

18 March and 16 October 2014

This is an edited transcript of interviews with Peter Kennedy on 18 March and 16 October 2014 in Melbourne, Victoria, by Deborah Edwards, senior curator of Australian art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, for the Balnaves Foundation Australian Sculpture Archive Project.

The project focuses on significant Australian sculptors and sculptural practice. It was developed with a grant from the Balnaves Foundation in 2010, which supported the recording and transcription of interviews with artists and other figures in Australian art.

About Peter Kennedy

Peter Kennedy (born 1945) is an Australian conceptual artists. A founding member of the cooperative artist space Inhibodress, which played a key role in Australian experimental art of the early 1970s, he has been a pioneer in installation, light, performance and sound work in this country.

This is an edited transcript of a recorded interview. Some adjustments, including deletions, have been made to the original as part of the editing process; however, the accuracy of all statements has not been verified and errors of fact may not have been corrected. The views expressed are those of the participants and do not represent those of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Interview on 18 March 2014

Deborah Edwards (DE): Can we start with the genesis years 1965–70? You said you were in Sydney by 1965 and you had studied under Jon Molvig in Brisbane, so I assume you were painting in some kind of an expressionist mode or were starting to be led in that direction by Molvig?

Peter Kennedy (PK): I possibly could have been led in that direction by Molvig who, of course, was the big name in Brisbane in those days, but I think I was not sufficiently artistically developed or sufficiently mature artistically to feel confident in working in an expressionist mode. I think I was probably still operating under the influence of people like Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd and [Russell] Drysdale. They were the big names. John Olsen was radical!

DE: And so the work that you showed in the Farmers Blaxland Gallery *Young contemporaries* exhibition in 65 would have been along those lines?

PK: It was a landscape of a type, although it wasn't completely figurative, but it was clearly a landscape, and I think it was imbued with Nollanesque, Boydesque, some Molvigian Freudian passages, but it was clearly a landscape and not as radical as say [John] Firth-Smith or Stephen Earle, who I think was one of the artists who won on one occasion during those two years when I exhibited in the *Young contemporaries* exhibition in the mid 60s. There was another artist who would be known to you because he did works with light, and that was Mike Kitching. He won it one year and I think Stephen Earle won it the other year. So when I saw those works they seemed pretty radical to me.

DE: Who did you have as your teacher – to interrupt for a minute – at East Sydney Tech[nical College, now the National Art School]?

PK: I can't remember the names.

DE: You wouldn't have had John Passmore?

PK: No. I do know that I wanted to get into Lyndon Dadswell's class, and somehow or other I managed to do that. At an unofficial, informal level, John Coburn allowed me to go to his life classes, or Tom Gleghorn had. So I operated informally, or unofficially, even though I was formally enrolled. The passage through the normal first-year curriculum struck me as being very uninteresting. I shot myself in the foot as I never got a diploma. I spent a lot of time in the library and this is where I discovered the stuff that I have been doing ever since.

DE: So there is a truth in the view that your first awakening, if you like, into what was then clearly an avant-garde practice, came through the international magazines that you saw at East Sydney Technical College?

PK: True, yes.

DE: And did they have *Flash Art*?

PK: They had *Flash Art* and it was in tabloid form, like a newspaper.

DE: And *Studio International*?

PK: *Studio International*, *Art International* and maybe *Artforum*, but I am not absolutely sure.

DE: I think [Robert] Klippel around the same time, late 50s and early 1960s, was reading *Artforum* in the State Library [of New South Wales], but that is at least six or seven years before you. It interests me that such establishment institutions had such subscriptions. So you were already receptive to change.

PK: I was highly alert and extremely receptive to change. And I think part of that receptivity was due somewhat to my failed academic career in primary school and secondary school. I failed comprehensively at everything.

DE: How do you fail primary school?

PK: In my day in the 1950s and I guess some decades before that – it got phased out in the 1960s but unfortunately for me it was still up and running when I sat for my so-called ‘scholarship’ examination which was at the end of primary school – and if you failed English and mathematics – not social studies, I think – if you failed mathematics or English you automatically failed and that was the end of your academic career. And, of course, I failed. But that didn’t stop me from going to Brisbane Grammar School, but I failed comprehensively there as well, except in English and history, those subjects. And I should point out there was no art course. The curriculum was convergent, in a conventional sense. It was all mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, geography. I did alright in the non-mathematical, non-science subjects, but that wasn’t enough to really give you a pass when you sat for what was called the junior examination.

So I had a certain problem with convention at that point. I felt like the odds were stacked against me and the answer to this for me was to work against anything that smacked of authority or academic practice or convention. And so I was only too willing, when I got into my own area of interest and milieu, to kick over the traces, to rebel, or to look for more radical, challenging ways of doing things. That seemed a part of my personality at that stage in my life, which was an early stage because I was probably around 19 or 20 when I was thinking through this.

DE: It makes sense that you choose an art school that was meant to be less conventional.

PK: Well, it was the only art school.

DE: So you did one year basically and then left.

PK: Yes, half a year actually.

DE: So that means that by the end of 1965, getting into 66, you’d left the art school, so 1966 looks like a pivotal year in relation to you beginning to see where you might want to go. I’m assuming you were still painting at that stage?

PK: Yes.

DE: Were you doing part-time work when you were 20 or 21? What were you doing before you went to Claude Neon?

PK: I had a job working in a silkscreen studio or factory, silkscreen printing huge signs, plastic signs, that were illuminated and went up over service stations, like BP and Shell and so on. But I was still painting, more or less, although I didn’t have a studio and at some point in 1965 I returned to Brisbane to rethink my position, as it were. I am not sure that I knew what I was doing at the time, but in retrospect I think that was what I was doing – thinking. And that led me to the view that if I was going to pursue an art career, which I desperately wanted to do, the thing was to look at other ways of making art. I had already been through

the library at East Sydney Tech, so this is 65 when I am digesting all of this and reformulating it. I spent some time in Brisbane in 66 after the silkscreen printing in Rosebery in Sydney, and then very early in 1967 I got the job at Claude Neon, having returned to Sydney. That would have been in February or March of 67. And that gave me a steady income.

DE: And were you finding your way to various people by then? Were you part of any group of students who visited various Sydney shows in those years? Can you remember, for example, if you saw [Stanislaus] Ostoja-Kotkowski's exhibition of electronic images and other luminal-kinetic works at Gallery A, Sydney, in September 66?

PK: I did not see that, no.

DE: Were you aware of his work at all? Did he cross your path?

PK: Well, I became aware of it very early but when, precisely, I am not sure. Would it have been in 65 when I was going through stuff in the library at East Sydney Tech? That would seem unlikely, it wouldn't have been in any magazines, although *Art and Australia* might have published something.

DE: You were looking at *Art and Australia*?

PK: Yes.

DE: They might have because he was already aligned to the Adelaide Festival of Arts by that stage. I don't know how Gallery A organised that show of 1966 with him. Who then were your artist-colleagues at the time, your cohorts?

PK: I didn't have any colleagues.

DE: So, quite a loner.

PK: Yes, I was very much a loner when I began working at Claude Neon. Well, between 1965 and 67 I was a loner. Through a mutual friend from Brisbane I met Mike Parr. And that would have been some time during 1967–68. And Mike at that point might have been doing a course at East Sydney Tech, but he was then primarily a poet, and although Mike might resist this for his own reasons, my memory is that I encouraged him to pursue his interest in visual art. So it just happened that we started talking very regularly, and probably drinking a bit as well, sometime during 1967, 68.

DE: Which is earlier than I thought.

PK: I think we would have found ourselves on a similar wavelength. But my recollection is that Mike persisted predominantly with the poetry through 68–69 because it wasn't until 1970 that he got the idea of establishing the gallery Inhibodress, of which I was somewhat sceptical – something I am on the record as saying. But in the end I thought that Gallery A was a little, maybe, precious, and if one was going to do more expanded forms of work then Gallery A was not the place because it had its clientele and was, of necessity, commercially orientated.

DE: Which was a strong judgement, given that in establishment circles it was being viewed as rather advanced, rather progressive.

PK: Yes, it was, I suppose, in retrospect.

DE: So just in terms of those years 67–68 and into those next couple of years, you were basically at Claude Neon three years full-time?

PK: No, six. I left there at the end of 72 then went overseas.

DE: I didn't realise that you were at Claude Neon until you left for the trip.

PK: Yes. Well, it paid for a lot of the work that I made during that period.

DE: The *Bulletin* critic in February 1970 described the job you took at Claude Neon as mechanical, but then another source claims you were 'a sign designer'. I am interested to know what your job was. And did you apply for a job there?

PK: I think it might have been advertised. I don't think I would have got the job otherwise.

DE: And in Sydney they were largely doing all the commercial signs?

PK: They were doing huge signs, the major signs all around Australia. They had branches in all the other capital cities but if you were doing, say, a Coca-Cola sign, those signs were designed in Sydney then sent to Perth or sent to Brisbane or wherever.

DE: Were you designing them up?

PK: I was doing the artwork. There were two types of signs that Claude Neon produced: there was the neon sign – and there were two types of neon signs broadly speaking – and there were plastic signs. Plastic signs were the signs that were screen-printed, double-sided, fluorescent tubes down the middle and illuminated. So, for example, they would have been like the fish and chip signs that hung under shop awnings, above footpaths.

The two types of neon signs were ones where the neon tubing was exposed to the elements and miraculously, generally speaking, seemed to survive the weather. Often they were very big, mounted on steel frames and bolted onto roofs. And then there were those, like the Coca-Cola signs, much bigger, more elaborate signs, mounted on large structures and in Sydney are possibly still there, in some form or other. The really big Coca-Cola sign in Sydney at the time was mounted at the top of William Street, Kings Cross.

DE: Claude Neon did that?

PK: Yes, and I think during the time when I was there it was mounted on the roof of the Pink Pussycat nightclub, right at the top of William Street. They were huge, these signs that utilised channel lettering involving sheet metal fabrication. For example, within the channel were perhaps six neon tubes. The illumination is contained, no spillage of light, so there is a concentrated intensity from the neon. The inside of the channel might be painted red. This introduced a red, not as intense as the neon red, but a red that glows and defines the channel in the form of the letter. And it is from that method of display that I have applied the channel technique which I've stuck with and which you've seen most recently in the National Gallery of Victoria work [*Light rain – and everything we know about the universe (except gravity)* 2013]. In commercial signage these signs were on timers and would cycle through a sequence of colours that would appear to run across letters, or would flash on or off, or do both.

DE: And were you intimately involved with what an engineer or a mechanical person was doing, in terms of actually designing, or was it quite separate?

PK: There was a senior artist – it seems quite strange to say now, he was 40 years old and that seemed old to me at the time – and five other people working in the art department, doing designs. We had air brushes connected to our desks. Compressed air would come up through the floor, through a hose. Our air brushes were mounted on the edge of the drawing desks, and if we were doing neon work we would airbrush the neon effects and then draw in with fluorescent paint, using a pen or fine brush, the neon tubes. It kind of glowed, this suggestion of neon and its halo light effect. At that point, 1967, I would have been 22. The senior artist, Colin, being 40, would have done some of the more intricate work on the big Coca-Cola type signs or others that we might have been doing, but at a certain point certain aspects of that would have been handed over to me and perhaps I would have carried on the work. Now, who worked out the light sequencing, the timing, of all of this stuff, I don't know. We simply did artwork on black illustration board and handed it over. That's what the client would see, these airbrushed night-time renderings on black board, and maybe there were instances of the light sequences being demonstrated in a storyboard format, I'm not sure, I don't recall.

DE: Because the factory making the neon was next to the office you worked in?

PK: Out the back. It was massive.

DE: Where was it?

PK: In Mascot, Gardeners Road, Mascot. The building is probably still there – yet again, maybe it has been knocked down, but it was a substantial building. All the administrative offices and the art department were at the front of the building on Gardeners Road and the factory extended all the way down the back.

DE: Stephen Jones, when he interviewed you, said that the first sign of your new direction came through colour, that your strong interest in colour in your paintings was the catalyst for you to jump into the extraordinary colour which neon represented. In other words, he implied that it was a primary interest in colour that propelled you into artificial light. What is your view about that?

PK: I don't remember seeing that mentioned in the *Light years* catalogue, but it may well be in one of his interview transcripts. He did a fine essay for that catalogue and got a lot of information out that wasn't already on the public record. I wouldn't necessarily subscribe to that theory or notion really. I think what drove me was less to do with colour, more clearly it was something to do with light, of an artificial type, but more particularly still, its relationship to space, how it figured in the space. And from what I can recollect, my primary impulse was to move from two-dimensional expression into a three-dimensional mode of working, allowing light to be configured in a spatial sense.

And I was working with that sense of space at the Institute of Modern Art [IMA] in Brisbane in 2011. I was basically taking the images that I still have from the Gallery A exhibitions and reconfiguring them to suit the IMA spaces, which were obviously much larger, but basically the way I did it was to set it up in the same way that I did for the two or three shows at Gallery A: the first, *Neon light installations*, in 1970, and then *Luminal sequences* in '71, but now combined at the IMA. You could see things through doorways and openings and the light elements were up here or down there or behind you or what have you. So to my mind it was less about colour, although I had to think about colour, in terms of what tubes I specified or what colour I made the channels, if they were works that involved channels, but uppermost in my mind was, 'How do I work with this spatially, in a three-dimensional space?'

DE: And that's not just sculptural, it's already about moving into ideas about an installation practice.

PK: Yes, sure. And at the beginning of 1970 this is a radical move, this is the challenge that I am throwing down. I believe this is art, but will the public, or the critics, think of it as art or as something else?

DE: How would you describe the scene generally by the late 60s? You are working at Claude Neon, you are doing that kind of work, you are talking to Parr quite often, and I presume meeting other people with him.

PK: Not a lot. I've never been naturally gregarious.

DE: That's surprises me.

PK: I can be gregarious, but I don't seek it. It's not my natural inclination, I suppose. I'm quite happy with my own company, which has stood me in good stead over the years.

DE: Sounds reasonable to me. And you were becoming politicised at the same time, weren't you? Were those things moving hand in hand for you?

PK: It hadn't crystallised at that point, in the sense that you might conceive of there being a discernible concentration of political ideas. It was casting around in an amorphous way. I mean, I did join one or several anti-Vietnam demonstrations in George Street in Sydney, but I had to take time off work to do so. And the art director, who had his office outside the art department proper, was a bit older again. He would have been in his mid-fifties, I suppose. I think he had a political background, going back to the 30s. He would have known people like Rod Shaw, a cartoonist originally for one of the newspapers. He had washed up in the neon business as well. I had to ask if I could go to a Vietnam demonstration, if I could have time off. Fortunately, he was sympathetic. But I wasn't engaged in a highly politicised sense in the way that students at university were.

DE: What about Clement Greenberg? Did you go to Greenberg's lecture at Sydney University in 1968? ['Avant-garde attitudes: new art in the sixties', the first Power Institute lecture]

PK: Yes.

DE: Did you already know Max Hutchinson who, in a sense, hosted it?

PK: I think I did. I think I tuned into Max around 1967.

DE: Max seems have played an important role. You referred to Hutchinson coming to see works of yours in Melbourne, I thought?

PK: No, it was at a studio I had in Waverley, Sydney.

DE: So he was up from Melbourne?

PK: Yes, and Gallery A was running in a terrace house in Gipps Street, Paddington.

DE: This is probably around 66.

PK: Yes, well, I had this studio in 67. I was able to afford a studio, the one I had in Waverley, because I was working at Claude Neon.

DE: Hutchinson would have known you from the *Young contemporaries*. He was astute, so he would have been looking at the ones coming up.

PK: He came and had a look at some paintings and offered me a show, but I felt it just wasn't the time to make the move. I don't think I was satisfied with the paintings. I'd seen some good painting shows there and the one that stood out and always remained in my mind – and it's kind of curious because he sort of disappeared off the radar – was the artist Leonard Hessing, who, I think, became an architect, although I'm not sure.

DE: The Art Gallery of New South Wales certainly holds paintings by Hessing. They are large, landscape based and very lyrical.

PK: And there was an American artist, I think a bit like Brett Whiteley, big, boldly coloured works. What was his name?

DE: Well, James Doolin was American and in Australia briefly, with very bold hard-edge abstractions ... So you went to Greenberg's lecture?

PK: I went to Greenberg's lecture. I think that was in the Qantas theatrette in the basement of the AMP building or what was then the AMP building at Circular Quay.

DE: I had thought it held somewhere at Sydney University.

PK: Maybe it was there. I had thought it was at Circular Quay.

DE: Certainly the whole Sydney scene was there, weren't they? I remember Janet Dawson talking to me about it. I believe she found it unconvincing.

PK: Yes, well, I think the people who were on the rise then, and attracting a lot of attention, were the Central Street crowd, and I think they got a big shock because I don't think Greenberg was at all interested in what they were doing. He did say at some point in his lecture, or in the context of an interview, that the artist who most impressed him was Sidney Nolan, because of Nolan's evocation of space. And this, of course, was not what they wanted to hear. And I remember thinking that must have been a shock because he was god and what he said came from on high. I remember that very clearly.

DE: Various artists I have spoken with have said that Greenberg was very reluctant, both at the lecture itself and at the party afterwards [that Hutchinson held at Mary Place, at the office of his printing press], to engage in any sort of discussion or answer any questions. He simply wished to deliver the lecture and then return to the USA. So I have had the sense of it being a largely unsatisfactory event.

PK: A classic example of American cultural imperialism!

DE: Yes, I suspect so. Now, by that stage the Tin Sheds was soon to be established. Donald Brook had come from Canberra to become an academic at the Power Institute of Fine Arts at the university. My understanding is that he and Marr Grounds from the faculty of architecture were prime movers in setting up the Tin Sheds in 1969, and Bert Flugelman was soon there.

PK: Brook arrived shortly after Bernard Smith.

DE: Yes, so did you find your way to those men? I mean, you were in the scene enough to go to the Greenberg lecture and go to the party afterwards?

PK: No, I was too outside the scene to receive such an invitation. I wasn't that far down the track at that point. I don't think I could see myself, even in a remote way, as being an insider until 1970, when I had the neon light installation show at Gallery A.

DE: That show elicited very wide positive press coverage.

PK: Yes, so that's when I started to make real connections. At that point I would have tuned into Bert Flugelman and Marr Grounds and Terry Smith.

DE: As they would, in turn, have discovered you. How did your 1970 Gallery A show come about? Did you approach Gallery A? I am assuming you had a project, an idea, and I think probably by 68, 69 you had already started to think about moving into neon.

PK: Yes. I think I would have approached Max, or Giulia Crespi, but it would have been through Max. They wouldn't have done anything without Max giving the OK.

DE: Especially if you already knew him and he had offered you a show, you could now have taken up his offer. But you provided him with a very different kind of show to the one he expected?

PK: Yes, that's right. I would imagine that some time in late 67 or some time in 68, I would have approached Max and said that I was working at Claude Neon and I've access to all this stuff and expertise. Would he be amenable to my doing a neon show? And he must have said yes. I would have worked on the drawings and then been given a date for sometime in February 1970. That would have firmed up some time in 69.

DE: So, just to make this clear, did your desire to work in neon come after going to work at Claude Neon or did you go to work at Claude Neon having decided to move into that medium? You would have understood that there was little luminal art being produced in Australia, would you not? Although you might have seen Frank Hinder's luminal-kinetic show at Gallery A perhaps?

PK: That's possible.

DE: It was in 1968.

PK: I could have seen it.

DE: They were largely light-boxes mounted on pedestals or the wall, held together by rubber bands in some instances, but very significant indeed.

PK: Yes. I was tuned into Gallery A at that point, and that seemed to be *the* gallery rather than Rudy Komon or Barry Stern or maybe even Watters.

DE: I've been fascinated to see recently that Robert Owen showed very early on at the Barry Stern Gallery.

PK: Did he?

DE: There was a range of very interesting artists showing at Barry Stern's that one would not necessarily associate with that space. The impression you have given thus far is that your interest in working in neon came after you started working at Claude Neon. Were you looking through various international magazines and being drawn to luminal art?

PK: It was concurrent. I was an opportunist. I knew I had to earn a living. I already had experience working in commercial art doing lettering, hand lettering, essential to designing signs, but I was also interested in breaking out of painting/sculpture modes, and attracted to working with light. By getting a job at Claude Neon I could start to fulfil that ambition.

DE: Well, it's very efficient because I would think there would have been various barriers to this at the time. Neon was not a new technology but there would have been certain practical or technical aspects of dealing with neon that you simply had to know about unless you wanted to start creating collaborative works.

PK: I don't think, at that time, that you could be an artist who might walk in off the street and say, 'I want to do a neon installation'. I don't think that would be understood or taken seriously.

DE: You wouldn't have been able to convince Gallery A, I should think, unless you were able to demonstrate that knowledge.

PK: It made it a real proposition from Gallery A's perspective, I'm sure.

DE: Yes, and one they took on, which is interesting. It was probably something quite new for them. The Hinder works arrived as boxes which one plugged in, but you were basically creating installations. That faith was vindicated by reviews. I think there is only one [negative review] ...

PK: Jack Lynn.

DE: Yes, but he didn't really attack the show. He simply declared his view, from the perspective of a tachist painter/collagist, that there had, to his mind, been very little artificial light work that produced anything of substance. What is interesting was that he implied – and so did a number of other critics – that if artificial light was used the artwork fell into the category of the decorative. Neon had a history as an advertising tool, and it was seen in some ways as a kind of contentless proposal. I don't know whether that affected you at the time. How did you feel yourself about the first [1970] show?

PK: I think at the time I regarded it as successful, and that has been my view ever since. It did open up things in a way that other artists, up until that point, perhaps hadn't contemplated or made public. Tim Johnson came along that year and did his own thing, so both exhibitions were mutually supportive, I think, at that point.

DE: When did he move into light?

PK: Not long after me. He showed some work in late 1970 or in the middle of 1970 that were Perspex constructions with light bulbs.

DE: Yes, light bulbs and Perspex hangings.

PK: That's right, but that might have been 71 – I'm not clear on that – but I do think it was 1970.

DE: When did you first meet him?

PK: I met him when I was installing *Neon light installations* in February. I heard the sound of a motorbike pull up and Tim walked in. He had already heard that I was doing this show and he was first cab off the rank.

DE: Ah, he was very interested to see what you were doing with light.

PK: And he acquired a couple of the little airbrushed drawings I'd rendered for the proposed works, which I have some photographs of.

DE: There are several in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art [Australia], Sydney.

PK: Yes, and in fact he may have sold those on, but I did four or five, or however many installations there were, and Tim immediately offered me \$10, and I thought, 'Money! I've hit the big time!' Tim and I became friends at that point. I have talked about being isolated, not knowing artists because I have this job at Claude Neon and I am not a university student, so I am not part of that milieu. There was Mike Parr, who was engaged with his poetry and then suddenly doing something else, and now here's Tim and then Ian Milliss pops up. Ian always had an acerbic view. He was a few years younger, by about four or five years, I think. Tim always referred to him as being precocious.

I had already, by 1970, made a connection with David Ahern because I was interested in experimental music, having been interested, via the magazines at East Sydney Tech[nical] College, now the National Art School, Sydney] library, in John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor and the electronic composers in Italy like [Luciano] Berio and [Karlheinz] Stockhausen in Germany, and so on. So, I entered the world of avant-garde music at the same time as those things I've just mentioned, and at that point I found myself in a milieu of intense experimentation, for want of a better way of describing it, in a funny kind of Australian way.

DE: You must have taken leave for your various performances at Inhibodress and you also had to man the space.

PK: This would have been in the evenings during the week, because Mike also had a job part-time teaching at that time and so the gallery, Inhibodress, was open at night, not during the day. However, it was open Saturday and Sunday nine-thirty or ten through to five o'clock. It was a killer of a regime, I know that.

DE: What always surprises me, when one looks back on exhibitions then, is that they were on for such a short period of time, perhaps two weeks. Did you get the impression that a lot of people came to your first Gallery A show?

PK: Yes, I think they did, and I think people were drawn to it for a variety of reasons obviously. I mean, who knows what would have been in the mind of individuals when they decided to come to see the exhibition, but I think novelty might have been an attractor. That is the way it was presented in the media by way of the reviews, articles and so on. It was the kind of art the critics were taking seriously, they were writing about it at length and so it must have made it onto the 'must-see agenda' of interested people who were either vaguely or intensely interested in some way.

DE: The Donald Brooks, the Terry Smiths.

PK: The Daniel Thomases.

DE: That milieu viewed the show.

PK: James Gleeson.

DE: James Gleeson was very interested. And then your artist colleagues or artists. Tim Johnson, clearly very interested.

PK: Ian Milliss, Neil Evans might be a name you may have come across, and a few others whose names don't immediately leap to mind, but I think there was a cohort of standard Sydney gallery-goers who I wouldn't have known at that point, who hardly knew me, or wouldn't have known me at all, but would have come to see the show. But by any measure, I regarded it as a success.

DE: It seemed to cause real waves. What about the financial measure? How did things work there? I have seen some of the financial statements from the Gallery A files and my impression of them is that working in neon is an expensive proposition, much more expensive than painting. And when you start working on installations, there are all sorts of other expenses. You had to hire an electrician, I presume?

PK: There were two electricians installing the show.

DE: Can you remember how it worked financially with Gallery A?

PK: At the financial level I was pretty naive. I had assumed, because when one is young one doesn't ask the necessary questions, that Claude Neon would have done this gratis on the basis of the publicity that followed, but at some later date – this came as a surprise to me – I heard, perhaps through someone in Claude Neon accounts department, that Gallery A hadn't paid for the production, and this was a surprise. I had thought that this arrangement revolved around mutual publicity. So when I left Gallery A I left behind several paintings and I imagine that those paintings would have ultimately been sold. I would not have been paid, rather the money from those sales would most likely have paid the bill. In talking to John Murphy, who organised the Gallery A show back in 2009, it was mentioned to me that he had seen a painting of mine, which would have been one of the ones that I had left behind, in the collection of – wait for it – Alan Jones! [The broadcaster] Alan Jones and [Gallery A director] Ann Lewis were great chums. But I decided not to follow a line of enquiry as to how this was sorted out between Gallery A and Claude Neon.

DE: But clearly well enough for them to mount further exhibitions with you.

PK: Well, that's right. They did the *Luminal sequences* exhibition the next year, in 1971.

DE: And they did the joint show with Tim Johnson, and in Melbourne as well.

PK: I was just blissfully ignorant, probably a good thing. It would have been too complicated for my simple understanding of life and commerce at that point.

DE: It could have been a real stumbling block if one had to stare down the barrel of costs of \$1000 odd. One would balk at that.

PK: I would have found myself dealing with some fairly hard-headed, commercially minded people.

DE: One last question. I was struck, in the Nick Chambers interview you did in 2008, that you said that you hadn't anticipated how ambient light would affect the space in your first show, and you described the effect rendered in, I thought, quite sculptural terms. The air seemed to be filled with this mix of colours, as though you were walking through it. You have mentioned before that there are certain ambient properties attached to light that you find extremely attractive. By the time of this first show, are such perceptions of light forming the agenda for your work? Are you interested by this stage in temporality? I am assuming

there's not necessarily any interest on your part in the ways that light has signalled the metaphysical. In other words, I wonder if you are able to give me a last comment on what was most important to you about the way light worked at this time.

PK: I'd say probably no to an interest in the metaphysical at the time. I would say yes to the temporal, and that was reflected in the *Luminal sequences* exhibition.

DE: Yes indeed, more than with the first [1970] exhibition.

PK: Where the spillage of light and the mixing and remixing of light occurred due to neon tubes turning off and on almost, I think, at random.

DE: Yes. An issue is how these installations address space. It seems to me that you are alluding to expanding interests; there are performance practices and conceptual art propositions involved, but I'm actually talking about a reaction to three-dimensionality.

PK: What I took from *Neon light installations* and carried through into *Luminal sequences* was this filling of space either with something immaterial or dematerialised in some way, that leads into an area of enquiry that is about occupying three-dimensional space. I think *Neon light installations* described space three-dimensionally in a quite particular way, but it is only ever a description until you become aware that light is filling the space, asserting its presence, shall we say, but is a presence of a diffused, elusive character. When we come to *But the fierce blackman* the space in that case is ...

DE: Animated?

PK: Animated, with sound. It's colonising the total space with something both immaterial, ephemeral and, at the same time paradoxically, substantial.

Interview on 16 October 2014

DE: What I hadn't asked you in our first interview was if you attended Donald Brook's riposte to the 1968 Clement Greenberg lecture? You had remembered going to the Greenberg lecture in 68, but in 1969, 'Flight from the object' was Brook's response. Did you get there?

PK: I don't think I did. I don't recall it. I would have probably read the paper that came out of the lecture, but I don't think I was present at the lecture.

DE: Did you see the 1968–69 touring exhibition *Art of the space age*? It was a Peter Stuyvesant Collection exhibition which incorporated a significant number of luminal works, including Frank Malina's 'lumidynes' and George Takis pieces. Originally scheduled for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, it was shown at Australia Square [as the Gallery was undergoing renovations].

PK: No. It's possible that I saw it but I would have thought that my engagement with work of that type would have been more likely through the book that came out by the German writer Udo Kultermann [*The new sculpture*, 1968]. It's possible that I saw that show but I might be conflating the show with that book, but I definitely would have seen that material in the Kultermann book, because I had the book.

DE: And you got it at the time that it was published?

PK: Yes.

DE: What about Frank Popper, who wrote extensively in the 1960s and 70s on luminal and kinetic art? I think his first book was out by 1967 [*Origins and development of kinetic art* was published in 1968].

PK: Yes.

DE: So that's quite early, and a couple of years before you are producing your own luminal art.

PK: Yes. And I think Donald Brook was a great fan of Popper. I think he would have quoted him quite a bit at the time.

DE: What about the Optronic Kinetics group – Bert Flugelman, David Smith and Jim McDonnell – attached to the Tin Sheds at Sydney University? Do you recall meeting them? They became active around 1970–71. Did you get to know them then?

PK: I didn't get to know them well and I would have known Bert better than the other two. I think I saw their efforts under construction at the time at the Tin Sheds when Bert was director there. I would not have seen it in the context of an exhibition necessarily, although I might have, but I did see stuff that they were working on because I visited the Tin Sheds and I would have had chats with Bert. But Jim McDonnell and David Smith seemed a little more remote. Bert was the overarching figure.

DE: Yes, he was there daily and the other guys were either architecture or engineering students. Stephen Jones has done quite a lot of work on the David Smith work, *Kinetic kaleidoscope*, which is in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection. Smith would have constructed it at Tin Sheds, probably over 1970, and it represented a very sophisticated luminal kinetic for that time.

Just as an aside, Christo's *Wrapped Coast* at Little Bay, Sydney, 1968–69. Did you assist with the work or go out to see it?

PK: Yes, I did. I wasn't involved in the wrapping, but I did go out and I think I may have gone to Christo and Jean Claude's lecture at the Power Institute. This was followed with great interest because he was one of the first international, so-called art superstars to visit our shores. This pre-dates the Sydney Biennales.

DE: He would have been seen as the start of a whole range of things, I think.

PK: Yes, that's right.

DE: So one is getting a picture of you being quite enmeshed in a particular milieu during 1968–69.

PK: Yes, that's right. To some extent.

DE: And you had connections to the Tin Sheds by then. Did you go to Little Bay with anyone in particular?

PK: I would have gone with Mike Parr, because Mike lived two or three doors down from where we were in Surry Hills and we saw a lot of one another so it's possible that we'd driven down together.

DE: OK. In relation to Donald Brook, my impression of Donald is that he was extremely influential in this period. He had completed a post-graduate scholarship at the Australian National University, finished his doctorate in 1967, I think, and had become a lecturer in the Power Institute at Sydney University by 1968–69 where he set up the Tin Sheds with Marr Grounds, pushing it through against some resistance, I gather. And he was already writing as a critic. His own artistic journey seemed to involve radical change around this time, from figurative works and portraits [in 1967] to attenuated wire compositions which appear to have alluded to various energies of the new digital and technological era.

PK: Yes, it was also coming out of that British post-war humanistic tradition, where there was a lot of concern on the part of an earlier generation, the Henry Moore generation, in relation to their experiences of the war and its significance to humanity subsequently. Even in those attenuated fine wire works there's a figurative element that seems very reminiscent of that. I'm reminded of Reg Butler. So it's transitional work, it's going from one very recent tradition to something which is moving altogether in another direction, I think, towards a futuristic modernism perhaps.

DE: Then there is the lecture, 'Flight from the object', a persuasion into conceptualism. Brook then moved to critiquing and theorising various aspects of contemporary art. As a critic my impression is that he would have been seen by a certain milieu as the primary, and avant-garde, critic of the day, beyond Gleeson and Daniel Thomas in importance, each, even in those early days, being more curatorially oriented, if you like. Brook was/is a philosopher. So I assume his work would have been very eagerly looked at by you and your colleagues.

PK: Yes, very much so.

DE: Brook may also have been one source for a strong interest in [Ludwig] Wittgenstein amongst a significant number of artists at the time. Can you comment on this? For many, Wittgenstein almost seems to have represented the conceptual project: that is, the notion of the artwork being a proposition for one to investigate seems to me to have been seen by many as intrinsically 'Wittgensteinian', but I am uncertain as to how this happened and who were the chief conduits. Perhaps firstly, did you have an interest in Wittgenstein yourself?

PK: I wouldn't have read him directly, although I would have read references to him. I know that Mike Parr did a work called *One hundred propositions* or *One hundred investigations* or something like that, which was clearly in that mode. How Wittgenstein might have influenced other artists I've really no idea. I think the feeling at the time was, here is a central philosophical figure who has some connection with what we are doing, someone we should pay attention to in the same way that the slightly older Central Street artists paid attention to Greenberg. I think it might have been people like Charles Harrison and some of the writers from *Studio International* at the time who were promulgating Wittgenstein. And how much you wanted to engage with it was up to the respective artist. I was aware that this was something one should know about but I couldn't specify in what way it was influential, other than presumably from what Mike was doing because the terminology seems linked.

DE: So Parr's interests didn't lead you to read Wittgenstein in the late 60s?

PK: No, I don't think so.

DE: OK. Another luminal artist in Sydney in the 1960s was Mike Kitching, though his interests were clearly substantially different from your own. Did you cross paths at the time? It seems to me that one has, without wishing to be reductive, a conceptually orientated set of luminal artists, with you and Tim Johnson as its prime movers, and then a kind of 'pop

aesthetic of the luminal' which includes [Ken] Reinhard and Kitching. I wonder if the twain met?

PK: I think they would have been about ten years older – Kitching I think of being roughly the same age as Colin Lanceley – so there was really no crossover. But the work did strike me when I saw it at Farmers Blaxland Gallery, presumably at the so-called *Young contemporaries* exhibition, around 1965 or 66 [it was 1965]. It was a work that impressed me. I can't remember the luminal elements but maybe I saw a luminal work some time after that. It seemed to me to have more of a connection to Colin Lanceley than what I might have been subsequently thinking about myself. His work was more in the assemblage mode, and there was a pop aspect to it, I think. I seem to recall that there was something luminal about it. Maybe some light bulbs?

DE: Yes, in contrast to you, his luminal elements were light bulbs. Like Tim Johnson at the time.

PK: Yes.

DE: I can't remember if we've spoken about the Mildura sculpture shows but Mike Kitching had a large work called *Phoenix* which was a feature of the 1970 Mildura exhibition, and in fact Mildura Gallery purchased it. [*Phoenix II* from the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize won an acquisition award to become part of the Mildura Arts Centre collection.] Perhaps you saw it?

PK: I would have seen photographs of it, I think. It is ringing a few bells for me. Did you know, as of a matter of interest, that just recently there has been a reunion of Mildura [Sculpture] Triennial artists, just some several weeks ago, in Mildura, including Ken Scarlett and Tom McCullough?

DE: Well, there has been a show. Ken sent me the catalogue, a small catalogue of works mostly from the Mildura collection.

PK: I think the collection is mostly built on the triennials that they had.

DE: Yes, indeed. In relation to the three exhibitions you had of luminal work over 1970–71, can we discuss your subscription to the avant-garde notion of the dissociation between art as object and art as experience, and how you started to move in those first three shows into that area? To begin, I assume you would have structured up these shows, in your own mind, as a move further into avant-garde practice.

PK: Well, yes.

DE: And you would have thought this way at the time?

PK: Yes, I think I was highly conscious of the directions in which I was moving and where my real interests were. And I think it would have been my encounter with a lot of stuff. Probably some of the more powerful influences came to me via my association with David Ahern. He would have stimulated my interest in Fluxus and various avant-garde composers and musicians, who seemed to me to be taking music away from what we might have construed as constituting music in a traditional, conventional sense, into something which was much more experiential, much further away from conventional music, musical notational and performance that I, and most others up to that point, had been aware of, and into forms of performance that were only tangentially musical, more strongly conceptually based and experiential. And Ahern worked a lot with so-called lay musicians and apart from his being influenced as a student of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Stockhausen's electronic music, which Ahern was conversant with, he also performed with his group AZ Music fairly regularly

at Inhibodress and Watters Gallery and other venues. He also deployed the concept of Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra which, somewhat earlier, brought together lay musicians and professional musicians, the two groups combining to make music of a completely different type. I think that sort of activity was also informed by Cageian ideas, you know, randomness and chance. David was everywhere. Extraordinarily influential. So I had this feeling at the time that the avant-garde pulse was mostly in music of that kind, more than in the visual arts. It seemed to me that even Fluxus had this very strong performative musical orientation informing it. In reference to Fluxus, there were a lot of performances that were promoted as being music – nailing the keys of a piano and Charlotte Moorman doing events with the cello. It seemed more outrageous, more confronting, more anti-conventional compared to what I observed in the visual arts and that's where I wanted to put my energy. So I was more attracted to that than what was happening in the visual arts. I couldn't see the same parallels being drawn to the same degree, or demonstrated to the same degree, in the visual arts as I could in music, moving as it was in the direction I've just described.

DE: That's interesting. It pre-empts the question of why you moved away from the luminal in the early 70s.

PK: Yes.

DE: You spoke last time about concerning yourself with the territory of space in your work, and that you could do this by sound or you could do it with light. Are you saying here that actually the alignment of sound with avant-garde practice was much stronger than the alignment of [artificial] light with avant-garde practice? If that was the case, it is quite interesting, isn't it? Is it that light retained certain types of loaded association that were harder to move away from than sound? Do we move into the territory of poetry when we talk about that?

PK: It's a very good point. I hadn't thought about it, and I think you have expressed it very well, better than I had I got around to actually thinking about it. Yes, the light works I may have felt had a more overt connection to the visual than sound. Sound is sufficiently dematerialised and equates more emphatically with a radical position relative to the visual arts generally, and maybe this perception applies to the neon works I had done at Gallery A in 1970 and 71. And in 71, with *But the fierce blackman*, I felt that the use of sound in this work was a way of embracing the avant-garde, that the light works perhaps didn't allow me to get to that same point.

DE: Well, you were able to immediately uncouple your work from the aesthetic judgments that critics were still making, even Donald Brook. The thing that interests me, from let's say those 1970–71 shows, is that the critics certainly appear to have consistently written about your luminal work [in positive terms] as 'poetic'. That strikes me as not necessarily what a member of the avant-garde might want to hear about their work. The poetic, as in aspects of the metaphorical, would have to glance along the trajectory of notions of beauty, and that surely is also not where a conceptualist would want to move. But the poetic *is* an element of your luminal work, don't you agree? It is embedded, don't you think?

PK: It is, and it remains embedded up to the present moment.

DE: And when you look again to the early luminals, it is also there.

PK: That's right. The poetic strain has been a constant.

DE: How would you describe then your quite deliberate move away from creating luminal works very soon after this time? Was it that you couldn't deal with luminal work without being poetic in those kinds of ways, without going back immediately to the notion of art as object,

which you wanted to move away from but you did come back to eventually? How would you structure that shift? Would you say that it was experimental, and that when you later returned to luminal art it was a move into areas that encompassed elements you had gained by moving to the conceptual, that is a kind of loaded conceptualism encompassing both? In essence, did you feel dogged by the notion of the poetic in those early works?

PK: No, I don't think so.

DE: It wasn't a burden when Donald Brook claimed that yours was one of the most poetic shows he had seen? I will quote Terry Smith in a critique of your sound work *But the fierce blackman* at the same time: '*But the fierce blackman*, on at the same time, is an elemental audio visual experience ... thus conceptually richer and more demanding of the spectator participant than his *Luminal sequences*, and therefore in a word, better.'

PK: That's Terry, the radical, speaking.

DE: But that indicates how it was at the time.

PK: Yes. But Donald's reference to poetic in his review was something that I would have seen at the time as a virtue and as an affirmation of the work I was doing at that point. I would not have viewed it negatively at all, I believe, and I have always had this tendency to say that I value this clinging to the aesthetic, the value of the poetic, and I've tried to imbue whatever I've done with an aspect of that in whatever way it might be resolved in individual works. It's always been a crucial element, I think.

DE: Including in the sound and performance works?

PK: Yes, I think so.

DE: In that case, the question of why leave the luminal behind in the early 70s comes up again.

PK: There would be two factors to that, I think. One is that I felt I had run my race with the pieces I had done at Gallery A. Had people been ringing me up or knocking on my door, saying how about I do another neon installation, I may have continued, but there was no expression of interest from state galleries, for example. I didn't hear from the Art Gallery of New South Wales even though I was living in Sydney, or the National Gallery of Victoria, so in a way it sort of petered out for that reason. But also, by the end of 1972, I had left Claude Neon and I was travelling overseas so the access to the technology becomes tougher and all the neon work that I had actually made was made through funding that was not my own. So there was a drought of 20 years where the work got forgotten, interest had moved elsewhere, everything had become more political. There was the women's movement and then we get semiotics and all that French stuff. So interest moved elsewhere and the phone didn't ring, and there was no knocking on the door. So that's one explanation. There was also another reason. I think the work that I did post 72 was becoming more influenced by content, the incorporation of content, and that includes the events of 1975, with the dismissal of the Whitlam Government. Interestingly Peter Carey has just completed, or is writing, a book on that event. So when I travelled overseas in 73 and 74 and interviewed artists who were of interest, the importance of content became increasingly more present in my thoughts. At that point, it seemed, there was no means by which I could transpose the aesthetic, poetic aspects of the neon works as presented in my Gallery A neon installations. There did not seem to be a way to transpose the poetic into work that embodied content, and it was put aside for that reason.

DE: But of course you did end up doing that, with neon, later on.

PK: Yes, I did.

DE: You came back and found the means by which to do that.

PK: I found the way of using neon in a slightly different way, going back to signage, in crude terms, I guess, but not entirely. I'll show you a work I did for John Wardle Architects in 2001. The Gallery A approach seems to have infiltrated the work I did for John Wardle's office, which was then in Russell Street, Melbourne. I think early on I had assumed that anything that was reminiscent of signage, because that was my day job, that wasn't where the art was. Art was more pure, paired down, minimal.

DE: Advertising and the pop aesthetic had already shaped the use of neon as signage.

PK: Yes, that's right.

DE: That implies you had a very conscious desire not to move in a way that could be viewed as pop.

PK: Yes. Perhaps I saw myself as more minimalist than as a pop artist. When I return to using the written word in neon, inscribed neon, it's not so much like the signage artists using neon these days tend towards, which is in a pop mode; the trajectory, in my case, is more directed to ideas and has a literary expression, rather than the quick pop hit, shall we say. Which gets us back to the poetic.

DE: That's right. If there is the concept of critiquing, which I think there is in your work, it's not the [often one-dimensional] pop critique, it's actually a critique that is a deeper one in its elements. But it strikes me that in some of the later works, an interest in the capacity of light to engulf space, to deal with virtual volumes, remains a crucial one.

PK: Yes, it does.

DE: OK. Concerning neon and fluorescent light, it's a subtle line for you, isn't it? You largely use neon, and you want to avoid the pop and commercial nuances attached to it. Why not use more fluorescent light?

PK: Well, fluorescence, fluorescent light, is in the Art Gallery of New South Wales piece [*Floor piece 2* 1970, 2011], and a successful work, I think.

DE: Well yes, that work involved everything.

PK: That's right, and I think I mentioned to you the day we were setting it up at the Art Gallery of New South Wales I reckoned that it pre-dated Frank Gehry.

DE: Maybe we leave aside 'Why the particular light medium?' and deal a little with the 'art and technology' discussions of the period.

PK: Can I mention before we do that in that box there [pointing], which has all the working material from the Institute of Modern Art [Brisbane] exhibition, including the AGNSW work, there are images of fluorescent works that were photographed in 1970 at Claude Neon at night-time. The fluorescent tubes were photographed on banks of vertical racks used to burn in the gas. Did I ever show you those?

DE: You did.

PK: Those images were taken from negatives I have so I have never actually made an artwork from them. I have mock-ups of a work as something to be done in the future, but the moment has never arrived.

DE: So you didn't include the postcard reproductions that you produced from the negatives in any of the shows?

PK: No, these have never been seen. And they are quite beautiful in their own way. I'm wondering if I did show them to you or how you would have seen them.

DE: Has anyone ever reproduced them in an article?

PK: Not that I know of.

DE: They look like abstracts. I've seen them somewhere.

PK: I think they might have been seen at a film at the Museum of Contemporary Art [Australia], Sydney. Maybe projected when one of my light works was on an adjacent wall. That would be the only place you might have seen them.

DE: I didn't realise they were for artworks.

PK: Yes, but never realised. You might want to revisit those for your show.

DE: That's a good thought. How did you conceive of them as large?

PK: Well, I thought very seriously about them for the IMA exhibition but it wasn't possible in that context. I felt there were several ways to present them. One way was as a series of coloured prints or, alternately, as projections. That would require some consideration as to what to include, and in what sequence might they be projected, and at what scale, that sort of stuff.

Part of the regime of the time, for want of a better term, was to document everything. Claude Neon, after work, at night-time, in the middle of winter, provided an opportunity to document these illuminated banks of fluoro tubes, manufactured commercially, to go into shops etc. I don't recall the full range of uses.

DE: Was Claude Neon testing them at night?

PK: It had something to do with burning the gas in – to stabilise the colour or illumination – I'm not sure. But they were very beautiful, and as a potential artwork, dormant at the moment, in terms of a public life.

DE: We should think hard about that for the luminal show. Just in terms of your early shows, there was a quote from one of the critics, perhaps it was Daniel Thomas, asking you where you were positioned in terms of art and technology discussions of the era. Thomas, in reviewing the first luminal show, wrote, 'Unfamiliarity may make it seem quite inhuman and intellectual, but it's just as humanistic in its own way'.

The notion that art using the kinds of technologies you were using was dehumanised or depersonalised and therefore problematic appears a common one. Was that an active debate amongst artists at the time? Clearly the critics acted as some kind of conduit between the audience and the art in relation to this. There was a clearly recorded perception that using new technologies, particularly electronics, was moving into the direction of 'robot

art'. I'm wondering how much we can see these sorts of critical comments as a sign of active debate at the time.

PK: I'm not sure there was an active debate. Having heard you read that to me, I think Daniel would have been anticipating resistance within the broader audience he was writing for and so I would see it as a strategy on his part to break down or ameliorate that resistance and to encourage people into thinking about this new work, rather than it being a response on Daniel's part to any debate that was occurring. I think debate would be too determined a word for what was floating around.

DE: Is light art at the vanguard of the idea of 'dehumanised' art at this time? Electronics had not really taken off by then, had it? There are pop luminals that flash on and off, and the work of Ostojka-Kotkowski, but perhaps it is the systems being developed to control and shape [artificial] light in artworks which primarily signals new technologies in Australia at this time? The other implication in that critique is that luminal work is not simply depersonalised but also 'empty'. You talked earlier about content. Elwyn [Jack] Lynn wrote in 1971 that, 'most luminal works are not successful. It has been done but with rare success and most kinetics are simply décor, they are presenting undermining puzzles on how they're devised or they have old pictorial values in new form'. What are your thoughts on this?

PK: I would have thought that Jack's views as expressed there would have accorded more readily with the opinions of a broad audience, a gallery audience and an art readership generally, more than Daniel's or Donald's or Terry Smith's views. All of this is grounded in a very old question: 'It's okay, but is it art?' I think that permeates everything and leads to the main game, the main game being sculpture on plinths and paintings on walls – a defensive position.

DE: Yes, but the thing about Lynn that strikes me is that, whilst it conforms perhaps to a 'general public' notion, it also aligns itself with the view of Terry Smith, for example, who pitted your *But the fierce blackman* against your luminal works in terms of content. So bizarrely enough, at least at that level, there is some accord between those expressing purportedly 'general public' views and prominent contemporary critics in relation to the 'emptiness' of the luminal.

PK: I think everyone is talking but no one's listening. That's because there were other agendas that were ideological and political because we were in a time that was very political. Australia still had forces in Vietnam, for example.

DE: Yes, well, if you look back now, the 60s were an extraordinarily politicised decade.

PK: Yes, that's right.

DE: And 1968, a watershed year.

PK: But the 60s do translate a bit in Australia into the 70s because we were a bit behind, so the 70s here were really other people's 60s.

DE: I don't like to subscribe to the delay theory but you might be right.

PK: There is a bit of that.

DE: Could we go to your joint show with Tim Johnson in Melbourne [Peter Kennedy, *Luminal improvisations*, and Tim Johnson, *Lightworks, Unlimiteds*, Gallery A, Melbourne, 1970). You told Stephen Jones that you think the show should have been cancelled.

PK: My component of it, yes. Not Tim's.

DE: And those were your works largely in cotton duck?

PK: Yes, I think you saw one there. It is cotton duck. There were neon tubes that I had stapled onto cotton duck, which I was not happy with. But one work – the floor piece with wood wool and neon tubes that you have seen at the IMA – that, I thought, was a valid piece but I made the mistake, having had all those experiences with David Ahern and his Scratch Orchestra – AZ Music was the official name – of improvising, and I thought I could improvise with neon light.

DE: But you did successfully in exhibitions one and two, didn't you? Didn't you largely install those exhibitions in an experimental way?

PK: Yes, but I had done drawings and I had thought about it in spatial terms more clearly than I thought about the Gallery A space in Melbourne, which I had never seen before – in fact, I think that might have been my first trip to Melbourne.

DE: How did the Melbourne show come about? Did Max Hutchinson want Melbourne people to see your work? Actually was it Max then?

PK: I think Max was out of the frame so this would have been Giulia Crespi and Julie Mayer liaising with Cherelle Hutchinson in Melbourne, and together they would have arranged for Tim and me to do that exhibition.

DE: Now that's your first show with Tim?

PK: Yes, I've forgotten the chronology.

DE: Your second joint show was the November/December 1970 exhibition at Gallery A in Sydney.

PK: OK.

DE: Your first joint show is October 1970 in Melbourne. It must have somehow come up that the two of you do a joint show. Would that have been at your end or Gallery A?

PK: I can't recall.

DE: Were you having lengthy discussions with Tim at this time? I mean, he turned up to your first show, purchased some of your watercolours of the works, and started to work in light himself. I'm assuming there was a dialogue between the two of you, I guess about conceptualism generally, about performance, also about light.

PK: Yes, we would have been talking about things, talking about what each of us was doing, I imagine. So there would have been a bit of cross-referencing. I don't think you could say the discussions were intense.

DE: Is he about the same age?

PK: Tim, I think, is about a year or two younger than me. I would say born around 1947, 48. I was born in 45. But I think, even though the discussions were casual, they would have been sufficiently informative, you know. We both got something out of it.

DE: You were moving in a different direction from the previous two shows, but you reached the end of the install – was it about four to five pieces – and thought ... ?

PK: Well, I think the one you've got at the Gallery ...

DE: That's right.

PK: That was in the show with Tim in Sydney.

DE: But you had elements of this work in the Melbourne show, didn't you? I thought you had elements that were later used to create the work in the Sydney show.

PK: Yes, there was some expanded metal mesh in the Melbourne show but it wasn't done in quite the same way as subsequently installed in Sydney, in fact it was quite different. I wasn't happy with my contribution to the Melbourne exhibition, Tim's work was fine but I didn't like my stuff which is why I wanted to pull it out, but whether or not that ever happened, I don't know. But yes, there was some expanded metal mesh used in that show and I think I probably took from that – even though I didn't see it as a valid work in Melbourne – I took that and reworked the concept for Tim and my show at Gallery A, Sydney, at the end of 1970, and that's the work that you now have in the collection at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

DE: You didn't go back to the cotton duck? There weren't certain things you saw in those pieces that you could develop? What was the problem in a nutshell with those? I know you said that it was an experimental period and it didn't work, but what didn't work?

PK: Well, I think my approach was wrong. I thought I could improvise and I discovered that the materials I was working with – braided high-tension cable, the fragility of the glass relative to how I wanted to fix it to the cotton duck – it was all much more fragile, somehow less flexible, than I had anticipated and I realised that I had miscalculated. And so the work didn't have the kind of structure that I had originally planned it to have, that the materials I was using didn't provide the necessary structure and design relative to the space. For those reasons it was a failure.

DE: And what did you want the duck to do? The mesh diffused the light. It's as though the mesh cuts down on the light coming into the space. Were you hoping to do the same with the duck?

PK: I was trying to staple the duck around the tubes, cradling the tubes, to get a channel effect – an intensity of light within the folds of the material and a more diffuse light on the other parts of the fabric – but it didn't deliver. So the lesson there was that work in this medium has to be rigorously pre-planned and one doesn't take chances.

DE: I guess you were so agreeably surprised with the first show. I remember you saying how effective were the virtual volumes created in the work, which you hadn't necessarily predicted. So, it is non-predictive if you jump straight in, and rather more predictable if you prepare beforehand. With the second show, Donald Brook was extremely positive but he said he had a shadow of a doubt: 'there is an air of refinement and tastefulness about the proceedings as if the need has been felt to balance the rejection of traditional forms with adherence to tradition of aesthetic niceties: a sense of good design'.

For me those sorts of comments feed into ideas at the time about abstraction itself being 'empty'. It seems a strange platform for Brook to have. I don't know whether you remember that review, November–December 1970. He relates your work to the Bauhaus and says that it 'looks a shade more docile than it might have been'. Were you aware of a tendency, or

let's say a potential, for critics to tie luminal work to design? How much is the material [light] loaded in ways that you wanted to work against?

PK: I don't remember the review that you quoted but I can see in that context using the term 'design', and perhaps attaching to it the doubts that Donald has expressed in the review, could quite easily be seen to be linked with the decorative element of abstraction, so it doesn't seem an unreasonable proposition to me but I would tend not to imbue the notion of design as it's been applied there quite as negatively as he is expressing it or as you are perceiving it, because I always talk about design in my exhibitions, even now [with] this new work at the National Gallery of Victoria [*Light rain – and everything we know about the universe (except gravity)* 2013] when people asked, 'What are you doing?', I'd say that I was designing an installation for the NGV.

DE: But there is a much more positive attachment to the word now than there was in the late stages of modernist art where I do think the word 'design' was used pejoratively.

PK: I agree with you. It would have been loaded, yes. The connotation would have been negative.

DE: Now there are not negative connotations. Earlier, the concept of design was positioned at a lower category, a more arid pasture than the green fields of conceptual art.

PK: I think you are quite right. I hadn't thought about that, not having read that review, although I may well have a copy of it in my files. I think part of the negativity that we are associating with this, and Donald having used the term 'design', comes from a preoccupation with the notion that the gestural is more authentic, has a level of humanity associated with it that design doesn't. The notion of design is that the gesture is drained out of it. Maybe that's part of it. We haven't reached the point, at that time we're referring to, where we can put the value that we place in the gestural behind us and move on to something else.

DE: Terry Smith said at one time that you looked to Dan Flavin for your first solo show and Keith Sonnier for the second, and I was going to ask if you thought that was a reasonable assessment. *Luminal sequences* is, as you have said, much more about performance and interactivity – elements I don't necessarily associate with Sonnier.

PK: I would accept Dan Flavin as an influence in the first show. I would certainly have been aware of what Keith Sonnier was doing because he was very present at that time.

DE: Those West Coast luminal artists became very prominent very rapidly, don't you think?

PK: Yes. He did some beautiful work, really beautiful work. But I can't say that I would have gone beyond simply an awareness of what he had done. I couldn't ascribe to Sonnier the same sort of influence that Flavin might have had on me initially.

DE: It might be a slightly reductive kind of visual cueing because Sonnier, you remember, used a lot of the circular motifs.

PK: Did he?

DE: Yes, from around the mid 70s. My recollection was of a lot of trailing cords but quite beautiful, large circles of colour.

PK: But that's in the mid 70s and my work is earlier.

DE: Yes, true, OK, so we don't know why he said that.

PK: No, I would have seen these as pretty original. I wouldn't suggest any particular influence. I think the circles, by way of projection using theatre lighting set in relation to the neon components which were adjacent, came from an idea I would have drawn from Claude Neon, using timers for the flashing signs and the various effects they get of lights running vertically and horizontally, like on the Coca-Cola signs and so on. And the circle, as projected on the wall, was a way of measuring the effect of the timers when the neons went on and off. So the spots would be strong one moment, pale the next, depending when the neon came on and when they switched off. I think this came from my observations working in the neon industry. I can't see where Keith Sonnier would have fitted in but who knows – osmosis at work.

DE: Do you have video footage of *Luminal sequences*?

PK: No.

DE: Daniel Thomas, writing of the 70s quite a bit later, said that what happened in both your performance and the light works was physical, not conceptual. He says your works of this time do not make one think or visualise, as much as experience physically. What do you think?

PK: Well, I think that's fair enough. I think it's a valid perception, it doesn't trouble me. It's one way of describing the work or the experience of the work that might be particular to Daniel, might not be particular to somebody else, but I don't think it's an invalid one. I accept it.

DE: Looking at it retrospectively, would you go along with writers who have seen the art produced in these decades – the late 60s and into the 70s – as very much part of that flux between formalism and what we now view as postmodernism? Are you comfortable with positioning your works of those years in terms of those kinds of labels?

PK: Well, I would position them transitionally. I think the work was stepping out of, or away from, what preceded it and moving towards something, something still in the air, but I don't think that anyone at that time could foresee its shifting to the postmodern, which really, as an idea, didn't take hold until the 1980s. I mean postmodernism may have been taught in the context of architecture in the 70s, it might have been talked about by academics or theoreticians, but it wasn't a term that had any traction in the art world or amongst practising artists in the 70s.

DE: No, and it has now disappeared for a label that we don't quite yet have.

PK: That's right, it's just another form of modernism.

DE: Bernard Smith tried to bring us the 'formalesque'.

PK: He did, he tried very hard and it got into the Oxford Dictionary. Robert Nelson uses it from time to time.

DE: It makes some sense.

PK: I thought it was useful. So, I see those early 70s works, coming out of those years, as formative or transitional.

DE: Does 'formative' and 'transitional' end up becoming, in its maturity, 'hybrid'?

PK: I guess there is that possibility. They were hybrid works in a sense. Maybe I didn't use the term in the interview that we did a few months ago, but they were pastiches – I see the term in a non-pejorative sense, I hasten to add.

DE: There are implications of superficiality in the term which is not there in the works.

PK: Yes, that's right. But that's what artists do now. There's a profusion of expressive options that are consolidated in various ways.

DE: I guess what that means is that there is nothing that's unacceptable in critical terms. There's really just the market.

PK: That's right. I think one of the problems that I've had to address personally in terms of my practice is that, because I've worked across a wide range of media, I think that those given to a more traditional way of thinking have a problem with that. It suggests there is a view that tends to see this way of working as somewhat undirected or, alternatively, lacking genuine commitment.

DE: Do you think?

PK: Well, I think that's been the case. It could be I might be wrong, but I regard myself as somewhat marginalised because I haven't quite fitted into one of those boxes, as you have referred to it. But I think there is a way to look at the work, and it doesn't necessarily apply to those works in the first couple of years in the 1970s, but it does emanate from that period and it arches over everything, right up to the present. There are unifying elements. There is the consistency with which I have engaged with the same media, although it can be broadly various – moving image, film, video, also sound – or it can be light, but beyond 72 there's a consistency of ideas or subject matter that is expressed in different ways. Looking back there are identifiable ongoing themes or connections linking the work, either in terms of ideas, subject matter and/or materials that are engaged in the cause of expression.

DE: I think your work is coherent and cohesive. There are also more traditional aspects, more 'formalesque' aspects in your works, one could say.

PK: Yes, that's true.

DE: I don't think any writer on your work, in any article, has given an explanation for why you went to South America on your first international trip, in 1972.

PK: They wouldn't. It was my partner Barbara Hall's initiative. She was desperate to go to South America.

DE: I thought maybe you had seen reference to the luminal work of significant South Americans in Paris and hatched the idea to go.

PK: Well, I had connections with South America through my involvement with Inhibodress and this network of connections around the world, including not only the United States, Canada and Europe, also Eastern Europe, but also South America. And in South America there was a man, Jorge Glusberg, who ran a gallery called CAYC [Centro de Arte y Comunicación in Buenos Aires, Argentina]. An industrialist, he put a lot of money into contemporary art in Buenos Aires and I met, through him, a number of artists who were well known in South America, some of them doing luminal work – their names don't immediately leap to mind, in fact I don't think I can even dredge them up at this point – but their work was

very sophisticated, like the work in *The new sculpture*, [Udo] Kultermann's book. They were doing it there in a more sophisticated way than we were managing to do here, I have to say.

DE: Possibly, although it is interesting that luminal art as a 60s phenomenon was very much a global one.

PK: Oh, yes.

DE: I haven't read anything that goes any significant way towards adequately explaining that.

PK: Well, they had their own language, of course – it was Spanish – and Brazilians as well as Argentineans would go to Paris the same way that we would go to London or New York, and their information would have been in French or Spanish language art magazines which, of course, never turned up here. So there was a distinct Latin visual culture and a particular aesthetic.

DE: How long were you there in South America?

PK: In Brazil and Buenos Aires principally, about two months.

DE: So when did you move back to luminal work? 1970–71 appear to have been very intense years for you, and then you were primarily exploring film and sound performance, before investigating drawing.

PK: And political work as well with the banners, those *November eleven* banners of 1979–81. I returned to the luminal work in the late 90s.

DE: With *Chorus: from the breath of wings*?

PK: No, that exhibition precedes the luminal work of the late 90s. It was at Heide Museum of Modern Art in 93. I have an updated CV that has a chronology of exhibitions in there [pointing]. No, this was a show in 1998 called *Requiem for ghosts* and it came about through a request from Jennifer Duncan as to whether I would be interested in being a participant in a series of shows they were curating at ACCA [the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne] on the subject of death. It was an offer too good to refuse, even though at the point the offer was made I had no idea what I would do. It seemed an opportunity to get some funding to re-engage with neon.

DE: So it was in your mind to go back to light by this stage clearly, that there were things still to do.

PK: Yes. I got two separate amounts of funding. I couldn't believe my luck. I received maybe \$12,000–15,000 from the Victorian government, and I think I got a \$20,000 New Development Grant from the Australia Council. So I was able to do work that I hadn't been able to do for a long time. But the other thing was that sometime during the late 80s there emerged a resurgence of interest in installation work. Installation came up on the radar again in a way that it hadn't for about ten or 12 years. It had dropped out somewhere around the mid to late 70s, superseded by neo-expressionist painting and semiotics, and nobody was terribly interested.

DE: It might have come through interest in so-called environmental art.

PK: It could have. I've often wondered this: how did it come back? Because it faded away and at that point I was feeling isolated because there was this considerable emphasis on

painting, Peter Booth and the whole figurative scene. That's where the attention was directed. But at some point installation is back, and by the time I got the opportunity to do this show at Heide in 93, for which Bernard [Smith] wrote a catalogue essay, I used fluorescent light in that. There were some fluorescent pieces and some projected light pieces but no neon. There was not the money on that occasion.

DE: So you brought [artificial] light back into your work with fluorescent lights.

PK: Tentatively.

DE: As your work starts to become very much about history and memory.

PK: Yes.

DE: Is it possible to elaborate a little on the role luminal elements play in terms of an oeuvre that, as you have said, becomes about 'memory chips in the contemporary moment'; that is, about memory, history and the present. Are there loadings in the material that you start to work with in ways you hadn't before? What's its role in this?

PK: Well, that's a good question. Part of it would be an ongoing interest in working with that material. I'd never felt that I had left it behind entirely. It was always a thread lying there since the early 1970s that, given the opportunity, I would be open to picking up again. But I think also it has a connection at the level of idea. The idea being that the use of light is consonant with illumination as a perceptual experience, that I was throwing light on moments of history, moments such as flux, transition, change, for example. In some respects the work deals with the unforeseen, the chaotic, and the random. So here we have a direct connection to what I engaged with as an artist at Claude Neon, which was signage: signposting moments that seemed to me to be quite important in terms of my own life, of what I had observed and experienced, particularly in this instance – *Chorus: from the breath of wings* at Heide – and subsequently what I did at ACCA, on the subject of death. Both exhibitions strongly connected with historical moments – the end of the Second World War providing the subject for *People who died the day I was born*, and then, for example, the work that is in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, *A language of the dead*, which features, in neon, words like communism, imperialism, socialism, bourgeois, utopia, the masses, collective – an expression of an ideology that permeates the first two-thirds of the 20th century and then suddenly collapses into nothing. Then there are the maps that are in the other room [pointing] that continue this line of thought. So I think of it as a way of attracting people, by way of signs and writing, to the work – the work as a site for contemplation.

DE: What about that idea of light as the neon sign having an historical specificity?

PK: It does.

DE: You can work outwards from that when you are dealing with moments in time, though we are not talking about duration anymore, are we? There is an almost elegiac thread through your work that light has a part to play in, isn't there? Some of your more recent luminal works are enmeshed in the elegy.

PK: Yes, it's true.

DE: You have said that you are not so interested in the metaphysical aspects of light, but there is a symbolism attached to light that you can start using in works like *Chorus: from north and south* 1996. I think you may have talked elsewhere about the extension of the poetic in that work into notions of the sublime. Concepts of the sublime are precisely the

kinds of symbolism attached to light. Though you also retain a political edge. If that's an accurate characterisation of these works, then light has really a quite critical part to play, doesn't it, in works where you want to extend notions of the poetic into concepts of the sublime perhaps, while also remaining, for want of a better word, politicised?

PK: Yes.

DE: There are also – we talked about a while ago – notions of the sculptural at play. It seems to me that, whilst these are installation works and therefore demonstrate an interest in the three-dimensional, light is the ground through which you have been most interested in three-dimensionality and therefore by which you are most 'sculptural' in your practice. Is that part of the preoccupation? That you want a depth that, strangely enough, has immateriality matching the conceptual density of the work? Light has a significant role to play in that.

PK: Yes, I agree entirely. I couldn't put it better myself. I think the elegiac, the sublime, the poetics of silence, the public address by way of signage, which is visual ... Silence connects very much to the poetic. Also having that connection with three-dimensional installation. This idea of an invasion of space by way of emission of light. I think the way you describe it is perfect. Had I had the presence of mind I would have used the same terms.

DE: When one invokes the sublime one opens the door to notions of transcendence, and if there is one material that has been coupled with transcendence, it is light. Not that neon signage is necessarily in that category. It subverts that in some ways, while partly partaking of it, perhaps. But the neutral, ambient fluorescent tube is more associated with notions of transcendence than either the light bulb or the neon sign. The territory of transcendence, that's quite complex territory to move into, don't you think? Or are you much more comfortable than you might have been in the 1970s with notions of poetic experience, apprehensions of the sublime and ideas of transcendence being part of the works you are creating? With *Requiem for ghost* those sorts of elegies are part of the work, aren't they?

PK: I think the work hovers on that edge, but I think the content draws it back from being fully transcendent. It draws it back to the present, or a recent past, to experiences that, because of their vestigial rawness, assert a corporeal presence. We may be on the edge of slipping over, as it were, into the sublime or the transcendent, but I think there is sufficient reason for us to stay this other side of the line.

DE: Because of their historical and political specificities.

PK: I did reject the transcendent option back in those early video works [1971–72] and I write about that in that catalogue. Those performance works were an attempt to draw the audience away from a loss of self, loss of identify, of having a transcendent experience, to something that likely reinforced a sense of self, and in so doing hypothesised a potential for action – hopefully, as I saw things at that time, some kind of radical, political action. [Bertolt] Brecht talks about the same thing, in fact, with his idea of alienation. It was by eliciting a strong sense of self-awareness that allowed the potential for political action.

DE: Would you go so far as to say that in the 1960s the idea of the transcendent in relation to art would have been seen, in politicised terms, as part of capitalist mythology? Is it too simplistic to say that the politic of bringing art into life at that time was about stripping art of those mythologies?

PK: Yes, I think the transcendent was inherent to abstract expressionism. I think that was its goal in some respects, particularly in the case of [Mark] Rothko; he'd be the prime example of that. But also [Jackson] Pollock, of course. But they were all concerned with the same thing. Greenberg was probably speaking about it in those terms in some way.

DE: The notion of the artwork as a proposition or research project has also shifted. So where are you in relation to where you've been?

PK: I think, at this point, I'm the creator of stories. Looking back over the work there is a sense that it covers the full spectrum of expressive possibilities. There's the personal, for example, in works over there [pointing], where I deal with my own mortality having received a fairly alarming diagnosis [in] 1999. And the great irony is, when I was working on *Requiem for ghosts* in 1998, I was becoming unwell at the same time. And then, in early 1999, I got a diagnosis that I had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a median survival time of three years from diagnosis. So I did these other works, just around the corner [pointing], using that experience as subject matter.

So that's the personal. There's the local, which are the *November eleven* banners and video tapes. There's the global, which is the collapse of the Berlin Wall and Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the former Yugoslavia and ethnic cleansing. And then the universal, which is *Everything we know about the universe (except gravity)* 2013. These works are like stories, I think, in some way, but they are stories that are told not necessarily in the conventional way that you would tell a story, meaning that they are not presented in essay form or short story form or as a book. This short story aspect notwithstanding, the works remain principally works of visual art.

DE: Yes, the insertion of narrative. That appears as a very significant development which has occurred in your art.

PK: It is, when I look back on it. I mean, it was not obvious to me for a long time and it's really in the last ten or 15 years that it's become obvious that that is what has been evolving, almost subliminally, I think.

DE: In relation to *Requiem for ghosts* 1998, the work is very much about presence and absence, isn't it? Was there a particular resonance for light in those terms? The whole concept of light as immaterial/material is a tantalising one in that respect. With light, and the way you have used light, there is presence and absence simultaneously. That also adds to the layering of the work.

PK: Yes, I think it is the fugitive aspect of light.

DE: And this can, at one level, take us to your recent large installation, *Everything we know about the universe (except gravity)*, because here you are dealing with things that are fugitive in relation to our 'common sense' view or apprehension of life and reality.

PK: I think so. Because this comes as an equation or formula, the so-called Standard Model [of particle physics], and that comes from crashing two particles together at a velocity faster than the speed of light. This formula is that moment. And that moment exists for three-trillionths of a second. How fugitive can you get? But particle physicists talk about this as real – that that three-trillionths of a second is real time, and can be measured as such.

DE: Anne Marsh has suggested that language is the key to the *Requiem for ghosts*, but isn't light an equally central element, because its function here, like sound, is to affect people in ways other than tangible, language-based ways. You are using language but not in ways that are narratively clear. I would have thought that there is an almost visceral effect of light in this work.

We haven't yet spoken about the concern with the perceptual modes of light. You came out of an era where there was a virtual obsession, amongst a wide range of artists, with those ways in which light has us perceive.

PK: Yes, that's right.

DE: What percentage would you estimate luminal works constituting in your oeuvre? Less than a quarter, do you think?

PK: Yes, I suppose so, but they are big.

DE: They have been made when circumstances permit. It's been the most expensive material that you've worked with.

PK: That's right, when the opportunity has arisen. I mean it would be a big show if I put all the luminal works together.

DE: Ultimately, are you able to say which has been the most resonant element for you? Sound or light?

PK: I'd give them equal status. But I think, in terms of currently existing works that are in collections, the greater amount of work would be neon work. The sound work, I think, would occupy only half the space required to display the neon.

DE: And is that anything to do with accessibility? You have spoken recently about your strong desire that your work is accessible. Clearly narrative plays a part in this, and light also seems a very useful element in relation to making a work accessible.

PK: Or attractive. By accessible I'm most likely referring to the viewer having access to the intention behind the work – the communicative imperative, if you like. It's made to be understood.

DE: Or attractive, and that's where colour comes into the equation with light. That is clear in your latest work also, that there is the seduction of the colour-light forms in space. You said in your interview with Anne Marsh that, 'the object of my work, perhaps the aim of all of my work since the early 1970s, has been to produce an art that speaks clearly, although paradoxically not in a familiar language, about the times it was made'.

PK: That's it in a nutshell really.

DE: Just in relation to the financial cost of creating luminal art ...

PK: All those really big things have come through windfalls of one sort or another and haven't really involved a great amount of proactivity on my part. I've endeavoured to be proactive in an attempt to initiate a range of opportunities over a considerable period of time but, despite the effort, it hasn't actually produced much in the way of substantial projects. It's the unpredictable, random moment of opportunity that has really been instrumental in keeping me going. Left to my own devices I haven't been that effective.

DE: I imagine there would be a range of random factors involved. The basic financial drain in using such expensive [artificial light] materials dictates that significant numbers of such works are created as commissions of one sort or another, or under other support, such as grants.

Maybe one last question because in a previous conversation it seems to me that you were quite clear in rejecting the notion of the metaphysical aspects of light in your art, but your *Light rain ...* work strikes me as being a strongly metaphysical work. For me, you have taken light back into an installation that deals with metaphysical things.

PK: Yes, that's true.

DE: Any problems with that?

PK: No, I don't [have any]. I'm amenable to openness, fluidity, going with the flow. In that context contradictions inevitably arise. First and foremost, it's about resolving the artwork. Variations of a 'U-turn' type that occur in that process happen unconsciously. Each work generates its own impulses that can lead anywhere. One simply follows the scent! It's haphazard, this process, and organic, and requires a level of awareness that is not conducive to discerning subtle shifts of direction. It is, nonetheless, an interesting observation, but, were I capable of such perception myself, I guess I would be intrigued but not confounded. It wouldn't stop the other factors in play continuing to contribute to the evolution of a work and its resolution.

Just to follow on the idea of 'openness'. Having introduced it in a way that is specific to my own practice, I should add that I also have an open-minded approach to artworks generally. I'm receptive to any work of art that is 'good', irrespective of period, style or, generally speaking, what the artist might be expressing or has achieved. Visual pleasure and intellectual stimulation are the criteria here. I have not nailed my artistic colours to the mast, as it were, proselytising only that which is of direct interest to me artistically, nor have I raised the drawbridge, shunning art that appears antithetical to my own interests or practice. In the end, it's just so long as it's good that matters.

I must mention that I am still entranced standing in front of [Arthur] Streeton's *Fire's on* or [Elioth] Gruner's *Spring frost* [both in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection] – works I first saw in reproductions as a child growing up in Brisbane. They still hold me in a way that seems little different now to that earliest experience.

DE: Well, this is where you've put your finger on the pulse. To be a maverick in the system. Artists are frequently categorised in relation to the market and its systems.

PK: But I've never really had any traction with the market. The market has remained oblivious. If, by the market, you mean private collectors or corporate collections as opposed to public collections, I have very few works in those kinds of collections.

DE: You don't produce easily commodifiable art.

PK: That's right. The market hasn't really played a role or, indeed, influenced how I've constructed my career.

DE: But it is nonetheless the matrix, the fabric within which one finds oneself working.

PK: Yes. The market is yet to knock on my door. Josh Milani's perceptions on this would be interesting.

[End]