In both perception and architecture, a threshold marks a point of transition, of passage toward or away from the perceptible, into or out of a place. Recognizing within the built environment the capacity of quotidian means to alter perception fundamentally, the nine installations in “Threshold” explore conditions of liminality, states of becoming other.

Curator Louise Dompierre locates the cultural context of this international show in a resurgence of “the concept of space as a speculative realm,” as witnessed in popular thought about cyberspace, for example. Indeed, dealing with generic space rather than site, these installations might be understood collectively as attempts to imagine the physical dimensions of a non-place of random-access potentiality — space formed by conjecture.

The exhibition proposes architectures of revelation and introspection that transcend existing material facts, divulging another recurrent motif: a certain grappling with “alternatives to an entirely secular state of being.” It is orchestrated as a succession of distinct spatio-temporal experiences — a directive structure echoed in many of the individual installations, which, as they dissolve architectural particularities in favour of abstract space, tend to both reveal and partake of its potential for control. Classically sublime, this “alternat-
ing current” of contemplation and persuasion propels these encounters beyond the familiar.

Opening physical space onto mental and emotional space, each of the installations displaces architectural bounds through sensual or perceptual instability. Cognitively, some suggest openings onto other spheres: realms of the imagination in Peter Kogler, models of disembodied communion in Mischa Kuball, alternative states of consciousness in Ann Lislegaard, or an uncertain retrieval of a lost past in Ian Carr-Harris. Others amplify the emotional potential of architecture as social structure, whether by reimagining familiar cultural edifices, as in Masato Nakamura or Judith Schwartz, or by drawing out the hidden longings of architectural features, as in Lyla Rye, Teresa Fernández and Claude Lévêque.

The apparent fog of Fernández’s Untitled (Smoke) (1998) sets the dual tone of meditation and unease. The walls of a corridor are spray-painted to meld the grey of its concrete floor gradually into the white of its ceiling, visually dissolving most architectural articulation, except its insistent directionality. The side walls are punctuated by a series of vertical mirrors clouded by translucent veils, reintegrating the indistinct haziness of the surrounding. As the mirrors reproduce each other in oblique and infinite regress, they open the axially spaced onto other dimensions. Passing through, one’s experience alternates between discrete forms of estrangement: viewing oneself in the mirrors as if at a distance and, when poised between mirrors, feeling invisible, as if having eluded representation within this obscurely overreacted space.

This enveloping atmosphere gives onto the calm brilliance of Ian Carr-Harris’ 231 Queens Quay West (1998), the one installation that draws on the historical specifics of the former industrial building. A blinding grid of light panels sweeps across the space, quietly replicating the voyage of the late-afternoon sun as it might once have shone through the long-covered-over western windows – an imagined excavation carrying the force of epiphany. The compelling effect is produced by two powerful projection mechanisms on a continuous twenty-mi-

national space of surprising depth, revolving around and completed in its own perceptual functioning.

Mischa Kuball’s galactic symbology of technological excess seems more crudely rhetorical. In deep darkness, the round beams of three slide projectors are each eclipsed by a spinning disco ball, allowing only thin halos of light to reach the walls intact. The remaining information contained in the beams – the words “space,” “speech” and “speed” – are refracted by the balls’ mirrored facets into brilliant bits of data impelled into dizzying orbits circling the room.

In a quite different version of otherworldly urging, for The Garden of Eden / The Need of Danger (1994) Ann Lislegaard has hung a row upon a row of black-lit white blinds from ceiling to floor, dividing the existing room into a regular succession of permeable, eerily phosphorescent chambers, in which we quickly lose our sense of depth. Instead, we might attempt to navigate by sound, guided by a disembodied mix of hypnotic Danish and English speech.

What we feel in the directed experience of these environments is a certain frisson of coercion, a thrill of disorienting compulsion that borders on duress. They reveal the wills to self-estrangement harboured by our edifices of belief and comfort. Conflating categories of experience, they confirm that the spaces of the familiar and the other are actually coextensive.

— Germaine Koh