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Making the invisible, visible: Exploring liminality of mind and body through glass

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Making the invisible, visible.
Exploring liminality of mind and body through glass.

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Abstract

It is through the discipline of visual arts that I research the subject of the mind–body relationship and the notion of liminality – this is the space in-between. To that end, the aim of this research is to investigate and construct a visible means of exhibiting liminal space. This creative work will be used as a metaphor for the synergy between body and mind, which I contend occurs within an internal liminal space. I investigate these concepts through the double articulation of creative practice and a written exegesis, based on the following research questions: ‘In what ways can glass be used as a metaphor for the liminal space in which mind and body connect?’ and, ‘Through what methods can visual art effectively communicate the notion of liminal space?’

The examination is undertaken through practice led research, using the theoretical and practical application of the methodology of reflexivity. The main theoretical framework of the research is based on the writings of French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Through creative practice and the written exegesis, I undertake a comparative analysis of the works of contemporary visual artists Anish Kapoor and Gabriella Bisetto. It is my endeavour, in using such artists, to critically analyse the themes of mind–body relationship, liminality and the material of glass.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Declaration iv

Acknowledgements v

Introduction 1

Chapter One 5
*The theoretical frameworks of embodied consciousness and liminality*
  Liminality
  Embodied Consciousness

Chapter Two 12
*Glass an analysis: no longer just breath, sand, water and fire*
  Significance

Chapter Three 18
*Being in the world – the relationship to creative practice.*
  *Anish Kapoor*
  *Gabriella Bisetto*
  *Making Liminality – Creating Glass*

Conclusion 40

References 42

Appendices 45
Introduction

For some time preceding my entrance into the field of visual arts, I had been interested in understanding the relationship between mind and body. As such, I participated in a number of courses and workshops relating to how I had developed the identity of self. Through this personal research, I began to be aware of how this perception I have of who I am in the world, affects the decisions and choices I make. It was through these experiences I came to the realisation that as human beings, our understanding of the world is an ongoing process that can be negotiated in many ways. Whilst these experiences influence me, it is through my creative practice that I have chosen to continue researching these themes.

I have primarily chosen to research through my creative practice, the relationship between the body and the mind, and specifically liminal space. Through this research I am endeavouring to locate another way of communicating or articulating the mind-body relationship. This research discusses both the mind and the body; however, it is the space between mind and body that is the focus of this examination.

As a visual artist, it is through my creative practice I contribute to researching the idea of making visible, the invisible, showing through the material that which is normally unseen. This investigation is with the material of glass, through the conceptual discourse of embodied consciousness and liminal space. The interaction and integration of the mind-body is a central theme in my praxis. Grundy defines praxis as “the form of action which is the expression of emancipatory interest” (cited in Crouch, 2007, p. 111). That is, the ongoing critical and reflexive engagement between the theoretical and creative aspects of my creative practice.

The research is conducted using the methodology of reflexivity as discussed by sociologist Anthony Giddens, in Modernity and self-identity (1991), Sociology (2006) and In defence of sociology (1996). Giddens themes of reflexivity and the reflexive-self are used to enter into a critical dialogue within my praxis. I critically analyse and position my work in relation to that of other practitioners in the context of visual arts. The purpose of the research is to produce a creative work of glass that investigates the role of liminal space within the paradigm of the mind-body relationship. I adopt a
reflexive attitude, otherwise, I am unaware of critical and theoretical precedence pertaining to the material, or other artists in my creative field.

The aim of my research is to investigate and make visible, through my creative practice, liminal space, as a visual metaphor for the ongoing internal synergy between mind and body. This will be conducted through the production and positioning of glass objects within the context of a public exhibition¹ to be held at Spectrum Project Space located in Northbridge, Western Australia. In using glass as my chosen medium it is essential that its current symbolic references be examined and if necessary, to facilitate my aims, bring about a different perception of the material.

The discourse of this exegesis will be undertaken through the investigation of two main research questions. Firstly, in what ways can glass be used as a metaphor for the liminal space in which mind and body connect? Secondly, through what methods can visual art effectively communicate the notion of liminal space? These questions will be explored by firstly defining the terms, liminality and embodied consciousness, and how they relate to the visible and the invisible. Then secondly, these terms will then be drawn on to locate, identify and discuss other artists' work, methods of production, public exhibition and finally my own creative practice.

My creative making processes and the response from others to my work has led me to explore the theoretical framework and writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty particularly his texts *Phenomenology of perception* (2002) and *The visible and the invisible* (1968). The theoretical framework of Merleau-Ponty, philosopher and phenomenologist, will be discussed in Chapter One, specifically his theories of the "embodied" and "consciousness" (2002). I will be referring to these theories together as the term "embodied consciousness" (Macey, 2001, p. 248). David Macey summarises Merleau-Ponty's theories relating to "embodied" and "consciousness" as, "the physical body is not only the seat of perception, but the vehicle for the being-in-the-world or being-in-situation of an embodied consciousness" (p. 248). Merleau-Ponty's terms "the visible" and "the invisible" will be explored in regards to their relationship to the material body and the immaterial mind.

¹ A reflexive analysis of these works will be developed in Chapter Three with accompanying images.
Merleau-Ponty describes the mind and perception as "the other side of the body overflows into it [the body]...is hidden in it...is anchored in it" (1968, p. 259). I contend that this is what is meant by an embodied consciousness. It is the unseen invisible consciousness that is anchored or contained within the visible body. Thus Merleau-Ponty refers to consciousness as making the invisible visible (1968). It is through glass making and installation within a public exhibition that I investigate the space of liminality as a metaphor for where mind and body meet.

The framework of embodied consciousness will be used in conjunction with Victor Turner’s (1979) theories of liminality to demonstrate the connection between the experiential space of liminality and the connection between mind and body. Turner’s concepts of liminality, which can be ascribed to the state between, a transitional space and the space in–between, will be developed further in this chapter. In order to reflexively engage with the research questions these concepts will be further analysed through the study of a number of works by sculptor Anish Kapoor and glass artist Gabriella Bisetto. Although an in-depth analysis of these artists will commence in Chapter Three.

Glass, as identified by Rosemarie Haag Bletter (1981), has a language of symbolism, often used as a metaphor for the higher self or consciousness or the mind, as well as representing water and the unseen (pp. 20-43). It is the symbolism of the consciousness and the unseen that will form the main content of Chapter Two. Consciousness, can be referred to as the mind, spirit, and soul; terms often used interchangeably to denote that part of human functionality and cognition that cannot be seen. The main focus of my research is to make visible the invisible, creating a visual means of communicating the invisible, the unseen aspect of our existence.

It is the symbolic references ascribed to glass that are particular to my research of liminality. In order to understand the existing symbolism of the material and how that has evolved, a brief overview of the material of glass will be undertaken via the writings of Bletter and Isobel Armstrong. Bletter (1981) discusses a pivotal period when the accessibility and availability of glass as an architectural material matches the architectural designs and plans of that time, along with the changing symbolism. I will explore Bletter’s (1981) perception that, due to the transparent qualities of glass – besides its architectural application as a physical barrier between interior and exterior
spaces – the material also has metaphoric symbolism which is significant not only in the material applications, but reflective of changes in societal attitude.

An exploration of Armstrong’s insights into the production of glass throughout the nineteenth century and the transformation of the symbolic language of glass will be undertaken in Chapter Two. Along with her dialectic view of the invisible and visible qualities of glass and its philosophical symbolism, I will relate her findings to the theoretical frameworks of Merleau-Ponty.

A critical analysis of the works and creative practices of Anish Kapoor and Gabriella Bisetto will be undertaken in Chapter Three in order to reflexively engage with the research questions. In analysing these works, I aim to unravel the questions of communicating the concept of liminality through visual arts as well as the role and symbolism of glass as a creative material.

This will be followed by a reflexive analysis of three key works of my own which are pertinent to the themes of mind, body and liminality. This is done in order to show not only the technical development of my current works, but to again respond to the research questions in relation to liminality and visual arts being a productive communicative tool².

² I am using the phrase communicative tool, to describe a visual means, which is used to impart a concept or idea.
Chapter One: *The theoretical frameworks of embodied consciousness and liminality.*

In order to investigate the precept that mind and body meet in a liminal space, it is essential to locate a framework through which to explore this concept. I have chosen to use the terms “liminality” as defined by Victor Turner in conjunction with the terms “embodied-consciousness” and “invisible and visible” as discussed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. These terms will be used to define the material body and immaterial mind in order to investigate where they meet to help establish a language through which my practice will be articulated.

**Liminality**

Victor Turner explains the concept of liminality; “literally ‘being-on-a-threshold’, means a state or process which is betwixt and between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states” (1979, p. 465). According to Turner liminal space can be considered then as a space in which “anything might, even should happen” (p. 465), a space full of potentiality. Liminal space is not only between places and between states such as interior and exterior, but also a space of transition in which experiences occur.

Turner also contends that forms of public liminality enacted through performance, rites, rituals and ceremony are also a method of “public reflexivity” (1979, p. 465). These rituals or public performances are enacted in order to reiterate or create a space of transition in which new laws, codes or patterns of behaviour are edified. It is in this manner of creating a space between what was and what can be, that is relevant to my theory of an internal liminal space between mind and body. The methods by which these performances happen are not restricted to ceremony, parades or dramatic performance but also include the creation and display of cultural objects such as sculptures in public exhibitions (pp. 467-468).

Giddens (2006) looks at the term reflexivity as the means by which the individual comes to an understanding of their self-identity. This is through an awareness of how they are culturally constructed within the institutional paradigms of society. Giddens explains that “Reflexivity...describes the connections between knowledge and social

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3 Turner acknowledges Van Gennep’s stages of public liminality as “(1) Separation from ordinary social life, (2) margin or limen meaning threshold... (3) Re-aggregation, when...ritually returned to regular life...in an altered state of consciousness” (p. 467).
life. The knowledge we gain about society can affect the way in which we act in it” (2006, p. 1034). Turner’s theory of reflexivity is congruent with Giddens as it is where a community or society “seeks to portray, understand and then act on itself” (1979, p. 465) in much the same sense as Giddens’ individual. In using reflexivity as a critical tool to analyse how the institutions of modernity act upon the individual, this allows scope for the individual to analyse their own actions in relation to the institutions. In relation to creative production, reflexivity in turn helps me locate existing cultural references and symbols that influence my praxis.

I am a visual artist, and being aware of how I am constructed and how I act as a consequence of knowledge attained by lived experience, creative production and textual analysis, gives an awareness of how I choose to act or engage in cultural dialogue through my creative practice. Giddens discusses the concept of the individual in the following manner: “the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities...individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences” (1991, p. 2). Understanding this theory of acted on and acting upon, demands that we acknowledge there is a dialogue between the individual and the institution, through which cultural references are established. It is through reflexively engaging with these cultural references, such as previous creative works and theoretical texts, that I gain historical knowledge about the interpretation of those works or materials. Through being aware of cultural references I may have, I can then select a variety of methods of creative production to help facilitate my aims.

According to Turner (1978, p. 465), the relationship between the individual and the institution or society occurs within a public liminal space. I contend, this is similar in manner to the relationship between the mind and the body, as both influence each other, however, this dialogue between mind and body occurs in an internal liminal space. The very production of this combined exegesis and creative work along with the exhibition in my opinion, can be seen as the result of an individual space-between, where I emerge from the liminal space and return back to society with an “altered state of consciousness” or “a higher status level” (Turner, 1979, pp. 465-467). This is considered as an acknowledgement of a difference in understanding or change in consciousness that has occurred whilst in this liminal space.
An example of this theory of liminality is evident in the work of installation artist and sculptor Anish Kapoor whose work will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. In the self-titled DVD Anish Kapoor, Kapoor discusses his work entitled Marsyas (2002. n.p.) (Fig. 1) in the following way: “It is through the material, the immaterial becomes known”. It is this space, where the material [body] and the immaterial [mind] meet that I investigate.

Figure 1


I agree with Merleau-Ponty (2002) that it is through the senses [body] as well as our perception [mind] of our experiences in the world that we [human-beings] form our story, our idea of who we are. In creating glass objects, it is intended to create a visual means of manifesting this concept of liminality, as a fluid and ever-evolving internal space. Through this visual creation my aim is to expand the body of knowledge in the field of conceptual glass practice.

**Embodied Consciousness**

Whilst researching my personal interest in perception, how we [human beings] perceive and what factors affect how we view the world; I found a number of references to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His contradictory attitude to the body from his predecessors became evident and led me to investigate his writings further.
I use the lense of "embodied" and "consciousness", found within the framework of Merleau-Ponty's writing, in an endeavour to understand and explain the relationship between mind and body. I examine the relationship between the visible [body], the invisible [mind], and use Turner's (1979) theories of liminal space to show the synergistic relationship between them. Merleau-Ponty was a prolific writer having had work published both during his lifetime and posthumously. His theories are distinctive within the field of French phenomenology; due to his attitude towards the body. Merleau-Ponty proposes that humans are embodied beings, by which he means that, the body [the material] is the site of perception and that consciousness or the mind [the immaterial], occurs or is contained within the body (2002, p. 2). Hence the significance of Macey’s interpretation and linking Merleau-Ponty’s terms “embodied” and “consciousness”, and references to his theories as embodied consciousness (2001, p. 248). Merleau-Ponty's predecessors, Heidegger and Husserl, took the view of a consciousness or mind that is disembodied (2001, pp. 247-248) and that perception is purely a mental capacity, which is occurring outside or separate to the body.

The research investigates the relationship between the body [as the site of perception] and mind [consciousness]. I mean by this, the visible material body and the invisible immaterial mind meet in a transitory space—liminal space. Merleau-Ponty contends we [human beings] are not able to acquire perspective on the world in an objective manner; this is because we perceive the world by being in it and experiencing of it (2002, p. 2).

Merleau-Ponty maintains that perception is a two-fold act of sensing via the body and experience. Therefore, if perception is the combination of the material body and the immaterial mind, there must be a space in which mind and body meet. I assert it is this space in-between the mind and body, where the material and the immaterial meet, that synergy occurs. It is this transitory space, the liminal space where the mind and body connect, that I research through the material of glass.

Ecologist and philosopher, David Abram (1996), also uses the theoretical framework of Merleau-Ponty to analyse the themes of perception through the mind and body, in respect to human being's relationship with nature. Like myself, Abram agrees with

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4 The body and mind will be referred to in a number of key ways: The body can be seen as: the material, the visible and the seer and seen, whilst the mind will be referred to as: consciousness, the immaterial, the invisible.
Merleau-Ponty’s theories of embodied consciousness which he articulates as; “other bodies [are] experienced from outside, one can vary distance from these bodies...while this is impossible, in relation to one’s own body” (p. 37). It is via the body that we have sensory and cognitive understanding, so the body and consciousness contained within it continuously frame us. Abram’s example of the mind being contained within the body is consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s theories of embodied consciousness. This assumption that there is an immaterial consciousness and a material body that makes a whole is further clarified when Merleau-Ponty states that “it is not something made, fabricated, by the assemblage of the two...they have never been apart” (1968, p. 265). What he means here is that the embodied consciousness is the synergistic whole of the mind-body relationship. It is my intention to show through my research that this transitional place where mind and body meet is within an internal liminal space.

When prefacing his interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s theories, Thomas Baldwin states, “the philosopher aims neither to give an explanation of the world, not to discover its conditions of possibility, but simply to express that contact with the world which precedes all thought about the world” (2007, p. 154). That is, entering into a dialogue of self in the world as an embodied being, is complicated by the suggestion that we are not able to get a perspective on the world in an objective manner, as we perceive the world by being in it and experiencing it. In the text Phenomenology of perception, Merleau-Ponty is privileging the body as being the subject of perception (2002, p. 2) even though traditionally the concept of perception was seen as being a mental capacity; it is through the physical attributes of the body that perception occurs. Merleau-Ponty contends that our perception of the world via sensory collection [the body] is a lived experience. We are in the world and therefore our bodies are attuned to the world and experience within that paradigm: “In order to perceive things, we need to live them” (p. 379). It is in the course of my research through the material of glass that I aim to produce an installation that evokes this concept of liminal space.

The incomplete working notes, written toward the end of Merleau-Ponty’s life, are where he articulates, although briefly, that the body is the visible and that the seer is also the seen (1968, p. 261). This is a coherent link to my own research through the material of glass which, whilst it is clear and invisible, it can also be seen through its inherent reflective and refracting qualities. Merleau-Ponty’s working notes were sometimes incomplete sentences and unfinished thoughts that were edited by Claude
Lefort and published as *The visible and the invisible* (1968). It is in these notes that Merleau-Ponty maintains that the “seer is of the visible” (p. 260) and he contends “the mind as the other side of the body” (p. 259). That is, if the body is at once the visible and the seen, it also contains the invisible and the unseen. As quoted in the introduction, Merleau-Ponty describes the mind as “the other side of the body overflows into it...is hidden in it... is anchored in it” (p. 259) which is what I contend meant by Macey’s term embodied consciousness (2001, p. 248). I use the material of glass to symbolise the concept of the human as both material and immaterial, existing in a visible and invisible manner concurrently. I assert as a material it elucidates the metaphors of visible and invisible. Merleau-Ponty’s theory of an embodied consciousness explains that consciousness is contained within the body and as such is invisible, but is made visible through the material body. I assert embodied consciousness is represented in my technical process of manipulating hot cast glass, which results in an internal space being created within the glass.

Through my research and the production of glass objects, I represent the mind–body relationship with the seen and unseen, thereby showing that the unseen invisible consciousness is anchored or contained within the visible body. These concepts show a clear link between the materials of my creative practice, glass and the conceptual framework of Merleau-Ponty. It is through the creation of blown vessels that the body is figuratively represented; for me, the vessel is literally seen as the container within which the immaterial or unseen mind is contained.

**Figure 2**  
The glass objects in Figures 2 and 3 are blown vessels or containers that can be likened to the body, which contains itself, much like the cast glass, yet it manifests in a different manner. This assumption of the mind being anchored in the body I would assert, links to the concept that the space in which the invisible [mind] and the visible [body] meet is liminal space – meaning it is literally the space in-between. Merleau-Ponty describes this as; “there is a body of the mind and a mind of the body and a chiasm between them” (1968, p. 259). This term “chiasm” is further unravelled in Merleau-Ponty’s working notes (pp. 263-264). I concur with Merleau-Ponty when he asserts that whilst the mind and body exist separately, there is a space in which they overlap. This concept of chiasm is described as synergy between mind and body and I agree when Merleau-Ponty says, “there is inside and outside turning about one another” (p. 264) meaning that the embodied consciousness is the synergistic whole of mind and body. It is in this chiasm I propose; there is a liminal space. It is in this liminal space where the meeting of the invisible and the visible occurs and the synergy between mind and body commences.

Having determined the working definitions of liminality and embodied consciousness along with the relationship to the invisible and visible, the next chapter will look at this relationship in regards to the material of glass. The function and framing of glass within Western society along with its symbolic references or language will be analysed. This analysis is done in order to distinguish how glass can be used as method of communication within the context of creative production.
Chapter Two: Glass an analysis, no longer breath, sand, water and fire.

This chapter will consider key aspects of the changing significance and symbolic language of glass through the writings of Isobel Armstrong and Rosemarie Haag Bletter. Both of their writings revolve around pivotal periods in the material development of glass and implementation of mass-produced glass. Armstrong concentrates specifically on the period 1830 to 1880, just prior to the mass mechanisation of manufacture, and Bletter focuses on the symbolic language of glass during the Expressionist architectural period. Their detailed discourse locates and assesses the change in symbolism of glass and therefore its evolving symbolic language.

Glass is a breakable liquid; an extremely hot liquid that is malleable yet can be extremely fragile. I contend that the alchemic combining of the raw materials and its physical properties from liquid to a fragile solid, epitomises the idea of in-between-states or liminality. Working with glass, is a matter of time and experience therefore I would argue that this is an example of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of lived experience. A desired outcome may occur by chance or serendipity. However, to consistently obtain similar results may take many hours of experimentation and documentation of process. It is the accumulation of knowledge of the material that makes the outcome more predictable. I may have a concept and method for the making of an object. However, the manufacture of these objects relies on the accumulation of skills in manipulating the glass, allowing for further research and development of creative projects to be materialised.

Glass as a material, within Western contemporary society, has long been used as an architectural feature, which has literally meant it is a space in-between the interior and exterior, a transitional space between two states. As a craft material, glass has a long and varied history that has been well documented and as such, a plethora of information is available. There are however, two key texts that have been reviewed for their metaphorical and symbolic analysis of glass.

Armstrong (2008) in her book titled Victorian glassworlds: Glass culture and the imagination 1830 – 1880, investigates the transition of glass culture from blown, hand-made craft based objects to the public realm. This investigation is through a series of theses based around the concepts of modernity and modernism (pp. 1-15). She states “I
attend to the language of glass in the physical world and in texts, rather than finding a language for it” (p. 14). Key elements of the literature are: the progression of methods of manufacture, from “blown by human breath” (p. 4) to mechanisation, as well as the roles of mediation and transformation of a material as a signifier for the transformation of a society.

Alongside the practical development of the material of glass, Armstrong discusses the method of making where “glass, was the spectre of his breath. So it insisted on both material and ontological meanings, a substance invoking matter and spirit. Glass was literally a paradoxical ethereal substance” (2008, p. 5). This description of glass, being literally matter and symbolically translucent, transparent or invisible is consistent with the theoretical frameworks of Merleau-Ponty (1968; 2002) and Turner’s (1979) concepts of liminality [the space in-between]. Armstrong argues that “transparency encourages a simple dualism, or, what is the opposite form of the same thing, the collapse of seer and seen into one another” (2008, p. 11). It is in transitory space where the visible and the invisible [seer and seen] exist and this is what is recognised elsewhere by Turner as liminal space. I propose that this concept of glass symbolism is cogent with my use of glass objects to visually research the themes of liminality.

Armstrong (2008, pp. 11-12) discusses Merleau-Ponty’s knowledge of glass history, citing transparency as a requirement of perception. This concept of transparency or the invisible is interconnected with Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the mind–body relationship. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of perception, as cited by Armstrong is a state that exists “between our body and the world, between ourselves and our body” (p. 12). It is this idea of perception being of both, the body and the mind which links my intended use of glass, the visible, yet transparent material, with the concepts of liminality.

The act of perception is a duality, where the perceiver is not only a seer but also the seen [visible], this is expressed by Armstrong (2008) as:

’a constituting subject which is transparent to itself’ fails to see that thought, corporeality, and the world they are in, are bound together (p. 22). The transparent subject fails to see that the body is incorporated in the act of perception and that they mediate one another. (p. 12)
Here Armstrong is unfolding Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of embodied consciousness, in which the invisible mind is bound to the visible physical body and it is a synergy of the two through which the world is perceived. Relating these ideas to glass as having symbolic reference to the individual who is visible and invisible, a divide of mind and body, which strengthens my argument of glass being a suitable material for my investigation of mind-body relationship through creative practice.

Bletter’s (1981) article “The interpretation of the glass dream-Expressionist architecture and the history of the crystal metaphor” in The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians is an example of critically analysing the material of glass; which is drawn from the discourse of Expressionist architectural installation. Bletter investigates and discusses the historical contexts and symbolism of glass. These symbolic references are particularly relevant to this research in regard to how current Western perceptions of glass as an architectural material evolved along with the change in its symbolism. It is noted that the majority of information in regards to glass and crystal iconography are to be found in written literature and elaborate manifestos rather than in physical installation, “Expressionist architects, familiar with the various earlier conventions, in a highly eclectic fashion reinterpret the meaning of the glass-crystal symbolism as a metaphor of transformation signifying a changed society” (Bletter, 1981, p. 20). I concur with Bletter’s outlook here, as she confirms, firstly, that the use of glass in architecture has a symbolic history that can be explored, secondly, that there are more applications for glass than utilitarian vessels and, thirdly, that the application of glass, at that time, metaphorically symbolised the transformation of society.

According to Bletter (1981) the Expressionist period of architecture was coloured by a lack of actual work due to the post war economy, and that the majority of evidence of this change in attitude was found in the archival drawings of that time. It seems that the concept of a translucent and flexible building material was desirable in this post war period to literally be reflective of the change in society at that time (pp. 21-22). Bletter acknowledges that the historical references used in her essay are not exhaustive. A reason a deeper investigation hadn’t occurred, is due to the main focus during this period being architectural fantasy (p. 22).

A tradition of religious writings refers to glass as having a reoccurring symbolism. The main interpretation of that symbolism is that of the reflective surface referencing water.
As Bletter states “it helps to reveal what would otherwise remain hidden” (1981, p. 23). To make material or visible what is normally unseen or unnoticed, integrates the material of glass with the theoretical frameworks of Merleau-Ponty and my research. Bletter acknowledges this concept of “inter-changeability [sic] of light, glass crystal...as metaphors of a transcendent life” (1981, p. 25). The distinction here is that the metaphor applies to the individual, the transcendence or illuminating of the individual. The change of symbolic references from religious to a personal context is found in Gothic stained glass windows, which reiterate the concept of transcendence of the individual. Whilst in a religious setting, these metaphors still establish the symbolism of the transitory, of the possibility of change, and of transformation on the level of the individual within an institutional context.

The religious setting enables the connection with the material of glass to the idea of the individual having both seen and unseen qualities. That in life the body is physical, material and visible. Yet an equally integral component – the mind or spirit – is immaterial and normally invisible to the human eye. This is relevant to the religious setting of the stained glass windows as it is in the afterlife that salvation for the immaterial is attained, indicating a separation of mind–body. Through my art practice of glass production and exhibition, I research the material and immaterial, in relation to the mind–body connection. There is a definite divide of mind–body, however I contend there is an internal space where there is an overlapping or meeting of the material and immaterial, which is integral to the synthesis between both states.

There are many metaphorical symbolisms for glass which reference architecture, such as an example by Bletter; “water and light were used to suggest a dissolution of solid materials into a fleeting vision of disembodied mobile architecture” (1981, p. 25). In these instances the meaning is generally looking at changes and advancement on a society level. Bletter clearly shows the importance of historical interpretation and symbolism in today’s understanding of glass metaphors. In my view, the material may now be less expensive and easily manufactured, but to a great extent there is a loss of symbolism, as the previous preciousness of the hand-made has become lost amongst mass produced items. I agree when Armstrong contends, “many of the concerns of glass culture have migrated, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to post modern

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5 These concepts of afterlife and salvation are derived from a Christian ideology on which the Gothic windows were based.
philosophy and to psychoanalysis...which often makes them difficult to recognize” (2008, p. 362).

It is significant to the research questions that the historical references or symbolic language of glass be located. I argue this is necessary to understand the current status glass holds as a material, particularly how its previous architectural application and symbolism was highly reflective of the larger institutional thinking of a society. Armstrong succinctly discusses this when she states, “a building’s meaning, and likewise the meaning of a glass artefact, also depends on the way it ‘physically determines our lifespace’ and thus physically orders our lifespace” (p. 15). I would contend, we are surrounded by the everydayness of the material. Through understanding Bletter’s argument, there was a transition of symbolic meaning “from a religious to a personal and finally a social context” (1982, p. 43) which enables the loss of symbolism for the individual to become apparent. I assert that the material of glass in this research symbolises the individual and acknowledges both the material and immaterial states. The symbolic reference to the individual will be discussed further in relation to my creative practice in Chapter Three. I would assert that the symbolism of the Expressionist architectural period are now obsolete as glass is no longer the new innovative flexible building material that it was in that era, but that hand-made glass is still imbued with symbolic meaning.

In order for my research to be reflexive, I not only look at the conceptual premise of an internal liminal space but also the symbolic references of the materials used to investigate these ideas. Having established that glass in Western society has lost the significance of symbolic references; through my research I aim to disrupt the current perception of glass as a mostly mass-produced functional architectural material. This is done in order to relocate and reinvigorate glass symbolism and I assert through my work that hand-made glass is symbolic of the personal, such as, an embodied being.

Significance
Glass is used in many different contexts, mainly as a functional utilitarian material or object. Although it was once thought to be a highly revolutionary material, as previously discussed by Bletter (1981, p. 21), she concedes that it is now a common everyday, construction material where its symbolic language has altered “from a religious to a personal and.. a social context” (p. 43). By creating, through my use of
glass in an exhibition context, a material representation of the visible and the invisible, it is my intention to bring about a different way of looking at the material.

Glass is currently widely used in a number of different ways for art applications. It is however, generally on the external surface of the glass that aesthetic applications are made. My work although seen through the translucent external surface, relies on the manipulation of the internal surface of the glass. This shares a commonality with the works of Gabriella Bisetto, particularly her works *little breaths* (2007) (Appendix 7 and 8) and those representations of the body or bodily functions, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three: *Being in the world – the relationship to creative practice*.

My creative work, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three, is not contingent on a functional object being the art. It is in the use of light and space, in conjunction with the object, that certain aspects of the glass become apparent, aspects that may have previously been invisible to the eye.

In developing research around liminality, the material of glass is used in a different manner, not as an architectural feature, but as a means of communication. I am reclaiming previous symbolic references to the individual, and the invisible as examined by Bletter (1981). I agree with Armstrong when she contends that “a glass container beckons to the primal experience of holding, at the same time literally containing fluids and materials” (2008, p. 15). I would argue that my research gives an alternative to the modern perception of glass being an industrial material or as being aesthetically pleasing but having functional properties. In Chapter Three I will discuss further how my research gives a contrasting opinion, that of glass as a communicative tool, through which a critical dialogue can be established with an audience in the context of a public exhibition.

Having this brief overview of the symbolic references and metaphors that have been attributed to glass now enables my creative work, produced for this research, and that of other artists to be critically analysed. The following chapter will look further at the methods in which visual arts effectively communicates liminality and ways in which glass can be used as a metaphor for liminal space. This will be done via an analysis of the works of Anish Kapoor and Gabriella Bisetto, as well as my own creative production and exhibition.
Chapter Three: Being in the world a relationship to practice.

In an endeavour to critically analyse the themes of liminality and conceptual glass practice, the technical and conceptual processes of my creative practice will be explored in this chapter. I will begin with an analysis of the works of artists Anish Kapoor and Gabriella Bisetto, whose practices have key conceptual and/or technical similarities to my own. The enquiry will be undertaken by examining the methods they have used to effectively communicate the concept of liminal space as well as what ways glass can be used as a metaphor for liminal space, particularly in relation to the mind–body connection. It is by critically engaging with artists’ works that I can critically and reflexively analyse my work in regards to outcomes relating to the process, formal aspects of the created objects and their public exhibition.

Anish Kapoor

In order to reflexively analyse Merleau-Ponty’s (2002) philosophy of experience and the concepts of visible and invisible, I examine the work of other creative practitioners such as installation artist and sculptor Anish Kapoor. I contend that Kapoor uses this concept of lived experience within his creative practice. He does so by reflexively engaging with his previous works, the space he is working within and this is most evident within his site-specific installations. He also has an ongoing dialogue with post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha; they most recently engaged in a discussion titled: Barbarism: Homi Bhabha in conversation with Anish Kapoor at the 2009 Brighton Festival where Kapoor was the guest artistic director. As a well-known international artist there are a number of books that locate the formal aspects of his work however, it is the critical analysis of his work by theorist Bhabha that are most pertinent to my research questions. In the essay “Anish Kapoor: Making emptiness” (1998, pp. 12-41), Bhabha analyses Kapoor’s work from a formal and conceptual perspective by entering into dialogue with space and emptiness. Using examples of Kapoor’s utilisation of space, scale and materials, provides key references for my research in investigating similar themes of space, transition and liminality.

Although this is not central to my research, Post-colonial theory in its most simplistic form looks at global consequences of European colonisation (Macey, 2001, p. 304). I relate Bhabha’s theme of third space to those of liminality.

Brighton Festival details can be located online at: http://www.brightonfestival.org/
Kapoor acknowledges that he and Bhabha have been long-time collaborators when he thanks his “dear friend Homi Bhabha, with whom I share a constant dialogue which continues to be a deep inspiration, for finding the words with which to give voice to a shared sense of the ‘indeterminate’” (1998, p. 9). I consider it important to consider Bhabha’s background in cultural theory, particularly his third space theory. This philosophy relates to colonial discourse, the creation of the other and cultural hybridity — where two systems, in this case, cultures intersect (Gunew, 1994). I contend this is also an application of Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) term chiasm. Whilst Bhabha’s terms are generally applied to cultural divisions as well as the intimate and public space, I argue that they are also critical in defining and expanding on the term liminality. I posit that Kapoor’s articulation of third space is another way of expressing liminality. For my research, I argue that the transition between the material body and the immaterial mind occurs in an internal liminal space.

Bhabha discusses the methods in which visual arts can effectively communicate the ideas of liminal space succinctly as he develops the theme of engendering emptiness by looking at Kapoor’s works *Adam* (1989) and *When I am pregnant* (1992)8 (Appendix 3 and 4). Bhabha identifies interior space that has been made visible in different ways: one through an opening and exposing of the inner surface and the other by a subtle change in the exterior surface. The manner in which Bhabha describes the relationship between the interior and exterior surfaces can be related to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of synergy between mind and body which he describes as “there is inside and outside turning about one another” (1968, p. 264). I assert that Bhabha articulates this notion as “this ‘doubleness’ or ‘otherness’ of the literal and the metaphoric, the empty and the void, their side by side proximity which inhabits Kapoor’s work” (1998, p. 20).

The themes of space and repetition is evident throughout Kapoor’s work, as he asserts, “I seem to be making the same shape, each time with a different purpose” (1998, p. 25). This is of significance to me as I use a repetitive process of glass making to investigate the relationship between the external and material and the internal and immaterial. The repetition of shape or void in Kapoor’s work, lends a familiarity to his theme, where he uses a number of different materials and incarnations of a space, void or abyss to research the point of potentiality (Turner, 1979). Bhabha in the description of Kapoor’s  

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8 Further images of Kapoor’s work can be found online and retrieved from http://www.anishkapoor.com/works/
work uses the framework of phenomenology, in particular Heidegger’s parable of the jug⁹ to discuss the binary relationship of interior/exterior, material/immaterial or positive/negative spaces. I have chosen the framework of Merleau-Ponty as discussed previously, due to his investigation into the body or flesh and its relationship to the material and immaterial and the visible and invisible. Kapoor investigates over and over again, relating to the phenomenological precept, that it is not what the object is to be or do, that is significant but what the void of the object is to contain (1998, pp. 18-19). The perception of the void or space in-between containing something is of particular interest to me as I contend that liminal space is an active space in which mind–body meet and synthesis occurs. I also assert that liminal space is an active space and that Kapoor’s definition of liminality gives clarity to this, “The void is not silent. I have always thought of it more and more as a transitional space, an in-between space” (1998, p. 37).

In noting that liminal space, or what Kapoor would term the void is not silent, is to recognise that the liminal space is not empty. This example of another artist’s method of defining liminality in regards to their own work is useful in informing definitions and existing cultural references for this research project.

It is the planning, research and installation stages of his work I contend that Kapoor reflexively analyses information about the works in relation to the exhibition space. His response to the space, over a period of time, allows the concept and a suitable work to become evident. In the development of Marsyas (2002) (Fig. 1), Kapoor used maquettes to experiment with a number of different shapes and configurations within the scaled down space of the Tate Modern in London, U.K., to get a sense of what is the perfect fit for the space. The maquettes accompanied by an extremely old computer drawing show the transition from one shape to another from a circle to a square. This formed the basis of the material concept for the Turbine Hall exhibition space at Tate Modern. The knowledge of methods of practice and examples of other artists’ processes, such as Kapoor, provide me with valuable insights into alternate possibilities for the production of my practice. In using a maquette to experiment with scale and shape until the desired effect is located, allows a clearer idea of how work may be viewed prior to installing it within the space. In developing my work for exhibition, I not only use simple drawings and sketches as a technique of experimentation but also like Kapoor, I use maquettes and other methods to trial materials and fittings prior to the production of the final

pieces. I do this to ensure not only the adequacy of the materials, but to allow for serendipity.

The manner in which Kapoor methodically engineers a form such as *Marsyas* (2002) alludes to a material being stretched or elongated between two locations. I found, when intuitively experimenting with the material of glass, that when two points touched and were stretched, that the material naturally formed this elongated shape, large rounded ends and thinned in the middle (Figs. 14 and 15). Kapoor likens *Marsyas* (2002) (Figs. 1, 16 and 17) to skin, being the substance that is the transition between body and the world. The title of the piece *Marsyas* also indicates its representation of the flayed skin of Marsyas [a mythical creature], its colour and texture being sensual and yet at the same time repulsive. Kapoor is using the work as a metaphorical and literal representation of a transitory or liminal substance; meaning the space in-between. In this work the theories of liminality are applied not only to the physical space of transition but also can be used to describe the space between the physical and mental, and between mind and body. This comparison is an important cultural reference within the larger artistic field.

This concept of the space in-between, as discussed in the first chapter, is investigated in an alternate paradigm by Turner, who recognises this phenomena of liminality as literally “being-on-a-threshold”, [meaning] a state or process which is betwixt and between” (1979, p. 465). In applying this term to an artwork, Kapoor discusses *Marsyas* (2002) as his “first work that is not only talking about skin, but is actually made of skin” (cited in Schneider, 2003, p. 143). Like the physical subject of skin, the piece has many layers of meaning. When looking at the monumental scale of *Marsyas* (2002) from the outside, the viewer is actually within an interior space. At that moment the viewer is experiencing a liminal space, a space that is at once both interior and exterior. I would assert, that it is in that moment the viewer is having an experience of being in the world as proposed by Merleau-Ponty (2002). It is the monumental scale of *Marsyas* (2002) that causes the viewer to be immersed in the experience of the work – not only objectively viewing it.

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10 Marsyas the title refers to Greek mythology, where a satyr who challenged the god Apollo and was flayed alive. *Marsyas* (2002 n.p.) More information can be retrieved from the http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/kapoor/default.htm

I contend the contrast between Kapoor’s works and my own highlights the difference in external and internal liminal space. A significant proportion of Kapoor’s work is of monumental scale, which I would argue signifies his investigation of the self in the world, an external liminal space, as in relation to Bhabha’s theory of cultural spaces. My work, which will be discussed more in depth later in the chapter, on the other hand, is of discreet size and contained within a closed vessel. This is intended to lead the viewer’s attention to the internal space contained within. In this manner, my intention is to disrupt the everyday reading of the material and evoke the personal, intimating the body and an internal liminal space. The concept of referencing the body in relation to liminal space is further discussed in the following analysis of Gabriella Bisetto’s work.

**Gabriella Bisetto**

Australian glass artist, Gabriella Bisetto, has little written critical analysis of her work, even though she has been a practising glass artist for almost twenty years. Having seen Bisetto’s work, it became evident that she uses a similar combination of both blown and hot cast glass processes to myself, in researching her themes of recording the body and human existence. This provides me with constructive technical insight into the material and the references associated with glass and the contemporary Australian glass studio landscape.

Written documentation of Bisetto’s recent work is available in the exhibition catalogues and popular, although not peer reviewed, art magazine *Craft Arts International* (Henry, 2008). In conjunction with the written descriptive articles, Bisetto also has an online artist talk, which can be downloaded from the *Artspeak Program 2007* at the University of South Australia, South Australian School of Art web site (2007a).

*Little breaths: a body of glass by Gabriella Bisetto* (2007) is a body of work in progress, based on or around the body, its interior or unseen components, and the unrecorded moments of existence (2007b, pp. 3-4). Her work is intended to bring attention to the manner in which we view [or not] our bodies, and the role of transience. In making enduring yet fragile blown objects, Bisetto is creating a memory bank of moments that are not normally recorded, like a breath (p. 4). Obviously breath is a process that is imperative to our existence, yet according to Bisetto not often considered important enough to be recorded or remembered (p. 3), as it is an everyday bodily occurrence. The everydayness of breath, I argue, has a constructive association to a
Western perception of glass as it is so much a part of the everyday landscape that it is no longer noticed. Armstrong’s view on glass, which has been discussed previously, is that “a building’s meaning, and likewise the meaning of a glass artefact, also depends on the way it ‘physically determines our lifespace’ and thus physically orders our lifespace” (p. 15). I contend that glass is so much a part of our everyday landscape it has become invisible, much like Bisetto’s reference to breath.

Although the body plays a significant role in my research, it is the space where the material and immaterial merge that I investigate. My work is not a recording of a physical attribute or bodily function; it is of an invisible intangible internal space in which the material and immaterial intersect. The body becomes significant to the work within an exhibition context. As it is with the body, the viewer will navigate the space, perceive the work and assimilate the information.

The last line of text in the catalogue Little breaths: a body of glass by Gabriella Bisetto (2007) allows a clear reading or interpretation of the work, and gives a context to the body of work as a whole, “I wanted to make the intangible tangible and the transitory permanent” (Bisetto, 2007b, p. 8). Our breath is made of air, a substance normally exterior to body, which is taken in as the act of continuing life, but mostly goes unseen. In her artist talk, Bisetto (2007a) describes an experience of the phenomena in witnessing her own breath on a cold day, which sent her back to the hotshop¹² to replicate that transitory moment of existence. This is one of many little moments which to her are like making the transitory permanent through the development of The shape of breath 2# (2007), (Bisetto, 2007b, p. 1) (Appendix 8).

In her online artist talk, Bisetto (2007b) discusses Crease (2005) and Aorta (2005) and explains that she was using representation of the material or physical, the external surfaces such as the joining of the arm or leg as shown in Crease. As well as referencing the internal, Aorta (2005), is an enlarged abstract of the normally unseen bodily function of blood flow. Bisetto’s fascination with the transience of bodily functions, are made evident through the manufacture of multiple representational pieces used to identify or be viewed as an abstract component of the body or its functions. This

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¹² Hotshop is the glass studio space in which hot blown glass is created. It contains equipment such as the furnace from which glass is gathered and a gas burner for reheating, along with glass blowing benches and annealers.
is a constructive reference for my research of the themes of mind and body; however, whilst Bisetto records bodily functions or attributes she does not necessarily relate the intangible with the immaterial mind.

In the view of Merleau-Ponty, the body is the site of perception (2002, p. 2). I assert that Bisetto's work communicates Merleau-Ponty's viewpoint that the body is where sensory collection occurs. Whilst her work represents and illustrates the significance of the body, it does not articulate the relationship of the mind and body as an intertwining of material and immaterial. It is through my practice that I materialise the synthesis of these by constructing a visual representation of an interior liminal space through glass.

Whilst Bisetto’s work *Exchange #1* (2007) (Fig. 4) shows a space between the exterior and interior – as a representation of a captured breath. It is in this representation of lived moments or bodily functions that Bisetto’s work differs from my research, as it is the transient moments, the spaces between inhaling and exhaling, the moment of synthesis or intertwining, where mind and body connect that is the key focus of my research.

Figure 4

![Image](http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/Staff/Homepage.asp?Name=Gabriella.Bisetto)


It is through using the material objects produced and installed for public exhibition that I create a reference to liminal or transitory space, a space full of potential (Turner, 1979). The intention of my work is to create a visual representation of liminal space which is firmly set in the present, the here and now. Through identifying and analysing the form, themes, construction and content of selected works of Kapoor and Bisetto, I
have a critical awareness of what cultural references and symbolisms currently exist. This will be discussed further in the next section, in relation to my creative practice.

**Making Liminality – Creating Glass**

My creative practice is in the process-based medium of glass making. Although I may repeat the same process a number of times, often the results are not uniform. Traditionally the craft of glassblowing has a ten to fifteen year apprenticeship as it takes a number of years to become skilled at manipulating the glass. Whilst developing my blown glass skills, I concurrently explored another glass process of hot casting. This is where the liquid glass is poured into a mould to form the desired shaped.

It was when experimenting with this process of hot casting that I explored the technique of steam sticking the glass. This is where I penetrate the still molten glass with a moisture-laden stick, and due to the extreme heat the moisture in the stick off-gases\(^\text{13}\) and a space is formed where gases are produced. As the glass cools and solidifies, this produces a space within the form. In my opinion, this space within the glass form could be seen to encapsulate the space in-between – metaphorically embodying the interplay between mind and body, where the immaterial is contained within the material. The material result of the glassmaking process for me therefore, can be viewed as representational, or metaphorically materialising liminal-space.

Through my creative practice I have been researching a variety of themes concerned with perception and the relationship to mind and body connection. Three key works related to this in the technical and conceptual development of my practice: *Moments of Reality* (2007), *Persist/Resist* (2007) and *Encapsulating-Moments in Time* (2008) (Figs. 5-10). All of these works use the same technical process of creating a space within the hot cast glass by using the steam-stick. After producing the work, I reflexively analyse the form of the glass and its method of installation for public exhibition.

*Moments of Reality* (2007) (Fig. 5) relied on the use of mirroring the interior surface of the space created. A mirror is normally a piece of flat glass that has been silvered on the back, creating a reflective surface. Although a mirror is meant to echo what is actually in front of it, what is real and what is seen in a mirror isn’t always factual, as perception

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\(^{13}\) The term “off-gasing” relates to the moisture in the wood being converted to gas and expanding within the glass.
of what is being seen plays a significant role. By silvering the inside of the curved glass, the normal function of the mirror is disrupted. The surface reflects in a distorted manner, where some areas are extremely smooth and well silvered and others tarnished and distorted, a little like memories. Areas may even seem to reflect a space that doesn’t seem to exist in the area surrounding the mirror however, what is significant is in that looking at all angles of the surface the viewer may glimpse moments of reality. This is important conceptually as this is intended to reference perception as being subjective and changing.

In contrast to my own work, a number of pivotal works by Kapoor use mirroring or high polished well-worked reflective surfaces to produce optical illusions that relay his themes of perception and space (Appendix 5 and 6). As discussed previously, Kapoor is well known for his use of monumental scale to communicate his concepts of space. My work, however, is of a discrete scale, objects that are of a more personal size as if designed to be held, carried or used, yet not for any functional or utilitarian use.

Responding to the idea of the mind and body being affected by external force resulted in the development of Persist/Resist (2007) (Figs. 6 and 7). Through this work I explore the idea of the internal consequences of external force. Persistence, which can be defined as “the continuance of an effect after its cause has ceased or been removed” but can also be “the ability of a living organism to resist being disturbed or altered” (MSN Encarta, n.d.). A person can refuse to accept or comply with external pressure and therefore resist change and transition; in that act they alter themselves internally, to barricade or defend themselves against change. Each instance that this occurs I would propose is a moment of transformation, even in the act of resistance.

In framing the glass components of Persist/Resist (2007), within a seemingly solid structure, I allude to the body as the boundary within which moments of perception were stored. The forms of the glass contained within the body are not uniform, alluding to a variety of experiences and yet having one form reflecting the external form to show the synthesis between the external and internal parts.
Size Diameter: Approx: 25 cm, 15 cm and 10cm
Figure 6


Figure 7

On reflexively analysing the form of the work, these shapes were often seen as referencing cells, perhaps even the dividing of cells. This was successful in referencing the material body however, the form was very flat and development of installation methods proved problematic with the use of silicone or two-part epoxy-resin\(^{14}\) to adhere the glass to its stands.

**Figure 8**

![Image of encapsulating installation](image_url)


\(^{14}\) Epoxy-resin can discolour (yellow/amber) affecting the aesthetic of the clear glass.
In the development of altering the previously flattened forms to move away from ‘cell-like’ shapes, I began to elongate the glass externally whilst the form was being steamed internally. This resulted in a variety of organic shapes on similar sized bases. These new forms were the components used in the work Encapsulating (2008) (Figs. 8-10). This was an exploration of memory as a form of internal reaction to stimuli. I cannot return to or recreate a moment in time and yet, new stimuli can alter my perception on a situation and shatter memory previously formed. Encapsulating metaphorically embodies the normally unseen chemical reactions or electrical impulses that are contained within the body, such as a memory. Whilst a memory can be savoured and relished by describing it to others, I can never again experience it in the same way as when it was made. Nor can another person experience it in the manner in which I did, as our experiences are framed, first and foremost by our own physical bodies. It was this work that led me to investigate the synthesis between the mind and body – the space in-between. I concur with Merleau-Ponty (1968) as he contends that there is an intertwining of both mind and body beyond the normal duality or binary of material and immaterial.
My current work developed for this Honours research is intended as a metaphorical representation of a normally unseen internal liminal space that exists between the mind and body. The work is not functional, nor easily recognisable, and cannot immediately be named or categorised. When installed\(^\text{15}\) it has familiar components; glass, metal\(^\text{16}\) and light that bring out the qualities of the glass that are not normally visible (Figs. 8, 9 and 10). Whilst some parts may seem recognisable, such as the blown bowls, which are cast into, it is the manner in which they are installed or placed that changes the reading of the work.

I intentionally create objects that are not immediately identifiable or representative. This is a deliberate act because if the work is not immediately identifiable to the viewer, then I expect that they will be more likely to have a different perception of the material. In this way it is about the experience of the work itself within the space, in which it is contained, and the relationship between the viewer and the object that is significant to me.

\(^{15}\) The installation of the work is a vital component of my practice as it is within the gallery context that a viewer interacts with the work. It is in the negotiation by the viewer of the space and the work contained within it, that the communicative quality of the work becomes apparent.

\(^{16}\) Refer to Appendix 1 and 2. *Passt the Universe is inside out 1,2 and 3* (2008) as installed at Gomboc Gallery in 2009. Glass and Aluminium stands.
To illustrate the discourse of thresholds between space and material, as previously stated Kapoor asserts, “It is through the material the immaterial becomes known” (2002, n.p.). It is this idea of space, where the material [body] and the immaterial [mind] meet that this project investigates. The creative aspect of my research project is intended to evoke a moment in which a decision is made, and or when a choice occurs. My intention is to give the audience a moment of pure potential (Turner, 1979), a space in which anything is and can be possible – alluding to a liminal space.

The viewer’s previous experiences of the material of glass will frame the viewer’s concept of what is occurring. As discussed in previous chapters, I agree with Armstrong (2008) and Bletter’s (1981) view that the Western perception of glass is as a mass-produced architectural feature. The intention in having non-recognisable pieces within the exhibition is to disrupt the viewer’s existing perception and expectation of the
material of glass. This is to facilitate the viewer’s reflexive engagement with the material, thereby opening a new dialogue and frame of reference for my work. In turn, my aim is that this will open up new possibilities of viewing glass beyond its functional properties.

In using the process of hot glass making, I see links between the different states of being that is, the material and the immaterial. In one state, glass is malleable, a viscous liquid that can be manipulated in a variety of ways. Yet when the liquid is in the process of cooling – becoming a solid, it is untouchable and unseen. The glass is sequestered inside an annealing kiln to cool at an appropriate rate so the glass does not shatter with thermal shock.

Figure 12


When the glass is cooling inside the annealer\(^1\), I consider the annealer as being symbolic of the material body, solid and visible to the world and the glass cooling within, representing the immaterial mind. In this sense, to me, this process also epitomises the term, embodied consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Macey, 2001, p. 248).

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\(^{1}\)An annealer is a kiln used to methodically cool the glass to prevent it shattering.
Whilst my initial proposal for this Honours research revolved around the production of glass bowls (Figs. 2, 3 and 11) to be used as moulds for hot casting and forming\(^{18}\), it became apparent that my own technical skills and physical capabilities left me unable to manufacture satisfactory vessels for this purpose. As a result of this I have used the Hyaline gaffers\(^{19}\) to aid in the production of the bowls. I assisted the Gaffer [Peter Reynolds] in manufacturing the bowls to my specifications ensuring the bases had a depth of glass that would prevent the form from slumping or changing too much once they were cast into.

My first test pieces were too thin and slumped into unrecognisable lumps of glass, which although not useable for public exhibition, highlighted to me the symbolism of the mind-body connection. A later electrical issue with an annealer again alerted me to this relationship, as when the glass was cooled too fast it shattered in a number of ways. However, where the hot cast glass was touching the blown glass bowl it did not separate. Therefore if the bowl represents the body and the cast glass the mind, these pieces epitomise the idea of mind-body relationship. Whilst there are obviously separate components [blown bowl, cast glass], there is a space where both components have merged. I posit that this is what Merleau-Ponty (1968) would name the chiasm, the space where neither exist separately – the liminal space.

It was vital to the continued development of my technical skills, and my understanding and research into liminal space, that I be able to produce works that could articulate my theme. In using my own body to manufacture the glass components I am able to identify and experience the internal dialogue between mind and body, in that sense become aware of my own internal liminality. Through locating this liminality, it gave me a direct experience of my own negotiation between mind and body. I may conceive an idea and attempt to manufacture it. However, the process of glass blowing is, in my experience, the synthesis of not only mind and body on an internal level but then carries

\(^{18}\) Gabriella Bisetto’s work *The Ocean Within (60% of body weight is water)* (2007), containing forty blown and hot cast glass bowls x 500mls, (Appendix 3) was pivotal in my development of the concept of framing glass within glass in order to obtain a three dimensional form. My creative works as seen in Figs. 2 and 10 were created using a combination of blown vessels. Once these forms were annealed a hole was drilled into them, which allowed the steam stick to penetrate the outer shell and manipulate the hot cast glass on the internal surface. Figs. 2 and 10 show only the component parts, which are being developed into glass and metal sculptures at the time of writing this exegesis. The final works will be presented in the exhibition at Spectrum Project Space.

\(^{19}\) Gaffer is the term for a professional or head glass blower. Many thanks to Peter Reynolds and David Hay for their continued mentoring, assistance, advice and support.
on out into the world. The process is between the combined mind–body and the material, which will be the subject of further research.

As a result of my inability to make bowl forms that were suitable for my installation, it afforded me the freedom to experiment with other options and forms of creative production. I began to make a variety of blown and manipulated forms, closing them off so that they were not vessels that could hold any material other than itself. In doing so, I recognised an old form of simple tear shaped vessels that I had experimented with in my first year of glass blowing, whilst on exchange in Canada\textsuperscript{20} in 2007 (Fig. 13).

Figure 13

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{tear_drops_dimples.png}
\caption{Hunter, N. (2007). \textit{Tear drops with dimples}. Blown and manipulated glass. Own image.}
\end{figure}

Using this concept of sealed vessels with the glass touched together in certain places, I revisited the theme and experimented with a size and shape that was within my physical capabilities and technical skills to create. Using reproductions on the theme led to the development of new works for this research project.

Through my research, I have discovered that when two gathering rods with molten glass on the ends touch they will adhere to each other. If they are then pulled apart, the

\textsuperscript{20} Whilst Edith Cowan University has access to Hyaline Studio at the Mt Lawley Campus, they do not have the facilities to teach glass blowing. To enable me to learn glass blowing I arranged with the assistance of the International office a one to one exchange with Alberta College of Art and Design, Calgary Canada. They have a four-year Fine Arts programme for glass blowing. During 2007 I undertook a student exchange for a period 12 months.
middle of the glass will thin out in a similar manner to *Marsyas* (2002). Touching together two or more spots of molten glass in a blown vessel and allowing the material to act organically as it was being stretched, led to a similar shape to the images that will be exhibited (Figs. 14 and 15).

Figure 14

![Figure 14](image)


Figure 15

![Figure 15](image)


I contend that a similar shape appears in Kapoor’s work *Marsyas* (2002). The PVC\(^{21}\) is elongated as if it had been one piece that was stretched between two or more points. It was here that I recognised that my forms were the result of the material literally being stretched between two locations and forming the elongated shape, whereas Kapoor engineered this shape, as seen in the image following (Figs. 16 and 17).

\(^{21}\) PVC is polyvinylchloride.
Using a combination of forms and translucent colours, I began a new body of work. I found each piece acted in a different manner according to where on the piece the glass was allowed to touch. In using translucent colours the object can be seen for both its external and internal surfaces at the same time – the colour graduating up the pieces as a literal representation of changing from one form to another – the material to immaterial. Whilst the majority of the vessels are closed so no additional materials can be added, there are some that opened during their manufacture exposing the symbolic liminal space (Fig. 18 and 19). In my blown work (Fig. 18), it is evident that an exterior and interior exist separately and, yet, I contest that this goes beyond the typical binary of opposites to a space where there is an overlapping, or as Merleau-Ponty (1968) names, a chiasm where an intertwining occurs. Whilst both states, interior/exterior, exist separately, there is an internal space, a liminal space, in which both exist at the same time.
Figure 18


Figure 19

The final stage of the research will be the public exhibition of the works at Spectrum Project Space in Northbridge. As I have a large area within the gallery and two distinct yet intimately related bodies of work, my intention is to divide the space to allude to the notion of liminal space. In dividing the space I am able, to a small degree, to direct the public through the exhibition space and this will be done with screening devices.

I intend to install the blown and sealed vessels on small floating shelves along one wall with enough space between the shelves for the viewers to negotiate with the shelves and the vessels. The lighting will be limited to direct lighting on the glass so that the refractive qualities showcase the internal manipulation of the blown vessels.

To further disrupt the notion of glass being a utilitarian material the blown and cast bowls will be installed as sculptural pieces. These will be fitted to metal stands building on a previous work *Pssst the universe is inside out* (2008) which was shown at Gomboc Gallery Middle Swan (Appendix 1 and 2). These pieces will be installed with secondary lighting from below so the internal manipulation will be accentuated. I would like to note that these concepts are subject to change, as I will be reflexively analysing and responding to the works within the nuances of the gallery space.
Conclusion

In Chapter One I have examined the theoretical frameworks of Merleau-Ponty (1968, 2002) and Turner (1979) in relation to the terms “embodied” and “consciousness”, “the visible” and “the invisible” as well as “liminality”. I have demonstrated that whilst the body and mind may be separate entities, a space occurs where there is an overlapping of mind-body. I contend that this is an internal liminal space. I assert that this is a space of potentiality (Turner, 1979) where synergy between mind and body occurs. Furthermore in Chapter Two, these terms have been related to glass – the material of my creative practice.

The perception of glass and its symbolism have been investigated via the writings of Bletter (1981) and Armstrong (2008) to show that glass has a long history of symbolic language that has been eroded over time. I contend that the symbolism of architectural glass as discussed by Bletter has been lost, and that in using hand-made glass I am reclaiming its’ symbolic references, and particularly that of the personal.

Through the lens of embodied consciousness (Macey, 2002, p. 248), liminality, the visible and the invisible, I have explored the creative practices of Anish Kapoor and Gabriella Bisetto in Chapter Three in order to reflexively engage with my own creative work. This exploration has been undertaken as a reflexive means of addressing the main research questions relating to visual arts effectively communicating the notions of liminal space and the manner in which glass can be used as a metaphor for liminal space. In reflexively engaging between the theoretical aspects of my research and the creative practice, I can critically analyse my work and reflexively install the glass for its public exhibition.

I have created glass objects, as a visual means of manifesting the concept of liminality, symbolising a fluid and ever-evolving internal space. Through this investigation I have shown that glass has a tradition of symbolic references, which make up a language, and over time those references have changed. As previously stated, I concur with Armstrong when she contends, “a glass container beckons to the primal experience of holding, at the same time literally containing fluids and materials” (2008, p. 15). However, in producing vessels that are closed or sealed (Figs. 18 and 19), what they contain is only the material itself and the space between the materials contains air, symbolising the
mind–body relationship. I would assert that these forms epitomise this idea of being material and immaterial, visible and invisible, whilst being of a scale that symbolically references the personal.

Through the development of this exegesis and creation of glass works (Figs. 18 and 19) I have demonstrated that hand-made glass is not only a utilitarian material, but has symbolic meaning, in particular the personal. As the objects I have made are of a discrete size they reference being held or used by person. However, the manner in which the vessels are sealed, where the glass touches and being non-functional, directs the viewer to relate to the glass in a different manner. My aim is that the viewer will consider what the purpose of the objects are, as they obviously contain something, but cannot be used in an everyday functional manner. The blown and cast vessels (Figs. 2, 3 and 11) again show a container, but one that only contains itself. The literal space created inside represents the internal liminal space between mind and body. In looking through the glass, its refractive qualities become evident and it is my intention that the viewer may even consider; ‘Where does the external glass end and the internal glass begin?’. I contend that the combination of these glass works, allude to a link between the material and immaterial, the visible and the invisible, which is symbolic of the mind-body relationship and liminal space.

I agree with Merleau-Ponty (2002) that it is through the senses [the body] as well as our perception [mind] of our experiences in the world, that we [human-beings] form our story. Our idea of who we are in the world. I assert however, that this relationship goes further, that it is not only the ongoing dialogue between the external and us, but also between the material body and the immaterial mind. I propose that it is within an internal liminal space that the body and mind meet and awareness is gained of how mind and body relate. Furthermore, these reflexive moments extend out to who or how we [human beings] act in and upon the world (Giddens, 1991).
References


Appendices

Appendix 1

Hunter, N. (2008). *Pssst the universe is inside out*. [Detail]. Own image.

Appendix 2

Hunter, N. (2008). *Pssst the universe is inside out 1,2 and 3*. Own image.
Appendix 3


Appendix 4

Appendix 5


Appendix 6

Appendix 7


Appendix 8