The transience of the interior self: Exploring the lost Real within a creative visual praxis

Jacqueline Monks
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The transience of the interior self: Exploring the lost Real within a creative visual praxis

By

Jacqui Monks
BA (Hons)

This dissertation is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Education and Arts
Edith Cowan University

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates psychological ideas of the interior self as transient and its relationship to the Real within a creative practice that includes video, projection and animation. The significance of the research is in the critical development of my creative practice and its creative outcome as a means of visually manifesting ideas of the interior self as explored by the theorist Slavoj Zizek. Theoretically, the notion of the interior self is defined as a transient state of co-existing contradictions. Its definition is located in Zizek’s reading of Jacques Lacan’s triad of orders that comprise the thinking self (Zizek, 2007a, p. 8). In Zizek, the interior self is positioned at the interstice between the Real and the Symbolic orders (Myers, 2003), hovering between life and death, absence and presence, here and not here, interior and exterior, real and not real.

In positioning the self in this manner, the inter-relationship of the Symbolic order and the order of the Real (Zizek, 1989, p. 191-192) is discussed with reference to the uncanny, extimacy and the gaze, and thus situate my creative work. Using the film theory of Kate Mondloch (2007; 2010) and with reference to Todd McGowan (2007) and Patrick Fuery (2000), I investigate the immersive or experiential possibilities of creative work in generating an inter-relationship between the work and the viewer, and thereby reveal the notion of the interior self as transient. It is within the reflexive praxis model (Crouch, 2007; 2012) that the critical examination unfolds. The investigation of works by artists who influence my practice, such as Anna Gaskell, Bill Viola, Mike Parr and Robbie Cooper are essential in further developing this approach and provide examples for this analysis. My creative work is reflexively examined in relation to various exhibitions held throughout my candidature. Ultimately, this research examines the notion of the interior self and the lost Real that defines it as transient, through a reflexive creative praxis, both in the content of the work, the medium of video, animation and projection, and in its relationship to viewer.
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;

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For the past seven years, I have studied visual arts through the faculty of Education and Arts, Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley, Western Australia. I would like to publicly acknowledge the support of the university, and the guidance and assistance of the SOCA staff, both academic and technical throughout this time.

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INTRODUCTION

The transience of the interior self: Exploring the lost Real within a creative visual praxis

This research investigates psychological ideas of the interior self as transient and its relationship to the Real within a creative practice that includes video, projection and animation. Theoretically, the notion of the interior self in this research is defined as in a constant state of flux, or transience; as concomitantly moving between contradictory states, and as existing in both states simultaneously. This is not a new area of research, indeed, the ambiguity of the interior self has been a cornerstone of post-Kantian philosophy and post-Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. The significance of the research is in the critical development of my creative practice and its creative outcome as a means of visually manifesting ideas of the interior self as explored by the theorist Slavoj Zizek. The implementation of reflexive engagement with the creative research and the use of the creative praxis model in situating the research within the broader social context are essential in supporting this critical development. In my creative research, I aim to explore ambiguity and interiority because we all have an interior life, separate from, yet inexorably bound to our external selves, which can be both a refuge and an inexplicable space of loneliness and disconnection. The focus of the creative outcomes was to create work in which the viewer has the opportunity to experience a visual reflection of transient interiority as a state that all human beings arguably share. It is perhaps the universality of this notion of self, highlighted by the volume of theoretical research that supports it, that underscores its broader and thereby significant creative communicative possibilities in the development of my critical creative practice.

I have focused the theoretical discussion of the self as transient within a definition espoused by Zizek and his reading of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Zizek’s focus on the psychological and his discussion of film as analogous of his ideas positions his writing as an apt springboard from which to theoretically discuss the interior self within a video art practice. The writing of Kate Mondloch (2007; 2010), Patrick Fuery (2000) and Todd McGowan (2010) are referenced to further this aim, in their discussions of the capacity of video work and film respectively as sites of concurrent psychological immersion and dislocation. In this respect, the theoretical framework used to research this area has been highly significant in relation to the creative work produced, its analysis, and its implications for the viewer.
The psychological order of the Real within Lacan’s triad of orders that comprise the thinking self (Zizek, 2007a, p. 8; Myers, p. 20), has enabled me to locate a definition of the interior self, and to unpack the notion of the Real as a void that determines it as at once lost to the self, yet concurrently bound to it as a defining factor of its existence. In Zizek, the interior self is positioned at the interstice between the Real and Symbolic orders (Myers, pp. 28 - 29), in a perpetual state of transience, hovering in a liminal space between life and death, absence and presence, here and not here, interior and exterior, real and not real. It is this space of psychological ambiguity and the lost Real's presence/absence within every transient, interior self that drives my creative praxis and fuels my analysis of works by artists that deal with these concerns.

In positioning the self in this manner, I discuss the inter-relationship of the Symbolic order and the order of the Real (Zizek, 1989, pp. 191-192), with reference to the uncanny, intimacy and the gaze, and thus situate my own creative work. Using the film theory of Mondloch (2007; 2010) and with reference to McGowan (2007) and Fuery (2000), I investigate the experiential possibilities of creative work in generating an inter-relationship between the work and the viewer and thereby reveal the notion of the interior self as transient. The term ‘experiential’ can be defined as “‘Relating to or resulting from experience’; ‘a personal, experiential reality,’” and “‘derived from experience or the experience of existence’” (“Experiential”, n.d.). By ‘experiential space’ (and in its interchangeable term, ‘immersive’), I am referring to a space in which the viewer may become immersed, mind and body. While the outcome of public exhibition for the viewer is not empirically measured in this research, it is within the reflexive praxis model that a critical examination can unfold. The investigation of works by artists who influence my practice, such as Anna Gaskell, Bill Viola, Mike Parr and Robbie Cooper are imperative in further developing this approach and provide examples for this analysis. My own creative work is reflexively examined in relation to various exhibitions held throughout my candidature. Ultimately, this research examines the notion of the interior self and the lost Real that defines it as transient, through a reflexive creative praxis with the aim of developing my critical creative practice, both in the content of the work, the medium of video, animation and projection, and in its relationship to viewer.

The Zizekian (1987; 1992; 1999a; 2000; 2005; 2006; 2007a) reading of Lacan’s writings on the self are referenced to place the notion of the Real within the psychology of the interior self, finding in psychoanalysis “a new kind of ‘formal’
analysis that ‘read’ the distortive effects of the Real” (Noys, 2010, n.p.). While I am not attempting to undertake a purely psychoanalytic approach through which to investigate the lost Real within, it is essential to reference writers invested in this area, as the interior self is the landscape over which my creative work treads. I refer to the interior self as the inner, or psychological terrain of the subject. Using the key word ‘interiority’ to describe how this term is used in my research, the interior self is “the inner life or substance: psychological existence” (“Interiority”, n.d.). It is the deconstruction of this term with reference to Zizek’s writings on the psychoanalytic via Lacan and, at times, Freud that my creative praxis is based. I have used video, projection and animation as the vehicles in which to cover this ambiguous ground, with particular reference to works exhibited between 2008 – 2012. Mondloch, Fuery, McGowan, and even Zizek who, in particular, reference the psychoanalytic and/or the experience of the viewer, are examined to place the work directly within the realm of the interior.

The use of reflexive analysis in conjunction with creative praxis forms the backbone of this research and as such, is discussed in detail in the Methodology section of the thesis. In a reflexive creative praxis, there is the opportunity to use theoretical ideas to contextualise the conceptual concerns of my creative work, providing a lens through which to analyse and thereby further develop my creative practice (Crouch, 2007; 2012). In the overall research, the communicative aims of praxis is evident not only in the positioning of creative work within a broader theoretical framework, but also via conference presentations and the publishing of papers to bring the work into the public academic forum. Also, in the development of creative work in a collaborative as well as an individual capacity, and the exhibition of the creative outcomes in a variety of public exhibition sites, from the formal gallery to the public carpark. As the published papers have been variously integrated into this dissertation and are accessible via public record, it is the reflexive analysis of the extensive public exhibition of creative work that formed a crucial component of the research, as evidenced in the Praxis subsections throughout the text. Used as markers to demonstrate the use of reflexive praxis within each Section of the thesis, these Praxis subsections detail the connection between the theoretical ideas that support the notion of the interior self and its link to the Real, and the creative work that explore them, with particular reference to exhibitions held throughout my candidature (see Appendix 1).

In creative praxis, there is a merging of theory and making or, in other words, “a way of thinking about action and a way of acting on thought” (Crouch & Pearce,
2012, p. 40) that defines its aim. Within this definition, I suggest that there is arguably an analogous link to be made between the co-existing states of contradiction that comprise the Real, which is itself variously described by Zizek as “a point of the immediate coincidence of the opposite poles: each of the poles passes immediately into its opposite; each is already in itself its own opposite” (1987, n.p.). Also the position of the interior self as at the interstice of a Symbolic order that defines it, and the Real that is lost to it, yet to which it is inextricably bound (Zizek, 1989, pp. 191-192; Myers, 2003, pp. 28-29). Positioning the interior self within these esoteric notions and within creative practice forms the theoretical base of my research, and thus constitutes both the Methodology section and Section 1 of this dissertation.

In Section 2, the transience of the interior self and its relationship to the lost Real is described through the corollary notions of extimacy and, by extension, the gaze and the uncanny. In extimacy, the interior self is defined by the external world of the Symbolic – it is literally, the intimate made external (Zizek, 2007b, p. 43; Myers, 2003, p. 41). The split between the interior self and that which gives it meaning leaves it vulnerable to mediation and forever separated from the Real and, I would assert, forever transient. The gaze is a consequence of extimacy, its focus in the form of the objet a (or object cause of desire) less about what is actually there and instead about what we imagine or desire. Its position within the interior self is important to my praxis for its relationship to the Real. In seeing what we imagine so convincingly by concurrently repressing what we don’t want to face, we create a veil over which the void of the Real as lost to us is hidden (Belsey, 2005, p. 42). In the uncanny, this denial is momentarily revealed. As Freud argues, we may recognise something as uncanny when it reflects back to us in some indirect way, that which we repress (1919, p. 244), including, perhaps, the ‘veil’ that obscures the Real, the terrifying nothingness that is forever lost to us, yet remains part of us. Positioning extimacy, the gaze and the uncanny within a creative practice offers me a way to visually investigate these notions in relation to the transient, interior self. Reflexively analysing Anna Gaskell’s works (Untitled) half life (2002) and (Untitled) turns gravity #2 (2010) provides a creative contextualisation of these themes, and leads to the analysis of several of my own works, including Beijing Train Ride (2010) from the Subtle exhibition; Untitled (2012) from the Crash exhibition; Stella and Steve (2011) from the Bring Your Own Beamer exhibition; Clouds (2009) at Breathing Space (2011); and Erin (2012) exhibited as part of Monster (2012). The latter three works
were also exhibited in my doctoral culmination exhibition, *Transience* (2012), (see Appendix 1).

Section 3 takes the ideas explored in the first two Sections, and applies them specifically to the creative methodologies that comprise my practice. Specifically, the projected image, video art, and the development of my animation process are analysed in relation to the lost Real of the interior, transient self. Comparisons are made between the creative processes of Mike Parr with reference also to William Kentridge to support the reflexive analyses of the animation method as described in a discussion of my works *Dis/Integrate* (2008-2009) and *Rooms I-V* (2012). Notions of death as another contradiction that determines the self as transient, presenting as a kind of absent presence in the interior self, are also discussed, specifically the ‘deathly trace’ of Parr’s work (Coulter-Smith & Magon, 1988, p. 22) and located in my own. This concept is further explored with reference to Zizek’s notion of the Act, or Symbolic suicide (Zizek, 2005, p. 33), in which the interior self’s longing to ‘escape’ the exterior world that controls it and renders it forever separate from itself, results in a type of fall into the Real (read: the death drive). The Act is discussed in relation to the video works of Anna Gaskell (*Future’s Eve*, 2001) and Bill Viola (*Stations*, 1994) respectively.

In Section 4, the position of the viewer to creative video works that investigate the lost Real of the interior, transient self is explored. As such, the notion of the experiential in relation to the installation of creative work to the viewer is discussed. Focusing on the notion of the immersive or experiential possibilities of screen-based art for the viewer, Kate Mondloch’s (2010) model of ‘double spatial dynamics’ is reviewed. Placing the viewer in a ‘here but not here’ state of liminality (Mondloch, 2010, p. 62), it is argued that this model is analogous to the state of the transient in-between that my research addresses and therefore positions it as relevant to my practice. The video work *Immersion* (2008-present) by Robbie Copper is explored in relation to the experiential. Notions of the gaze, the uncanny and extremity (via intimacy) are reviewed within this context, merging the lost Real of the interior self with the experiential, and suggesting the inter-relationship of these ideas between the filmic subject (read: the subject of the video/film, or the body on screen), and the viewer. These analyses’ form the basis of the reflexive examination of several of my works that have been exhibited in more than one site, including *Dis/Integrate* in the *Immerse* (2008) and *Ummm…The Articulate Practitioner* (2009) exhibitions; *Redshift*, a collaborative work exhibited in an outdoor carpark (2012) and later at the Perth Centre of Photography (2012); and *Domestic* and *Bridge* shown variously as
a part of *Suspension* (2012) and at *Breathing Space* (2012) and later as a part of *Rooms I-V* in *Transience* (2012).

The culmination of the creative praxis research is evidenced in the last Section, which details the solo exhibition *Transience* (2012), whose works formed the ongoing creative research detailed in the Praxis sections throughout the paper. In this section, the reflexive analysis of the exhibition supports the research that informed it.

It is in exploring the lost Real within that I can locate the space within the self that is ambiguous and transient – that hovers between co-existing, contradictory states that render the self neither one thing nor the other, yet concomitantly both at the same time. As a viewer, I am engaged by works that suggest unease. As a practitioner, it is the mystery as to what and why it is that particular visual works are imbued with this sense of disquiet that drives my research. My interest in the psychoanalytic terrain of the interior self in relation to this mystery is what brought me to the writings of Zizek. In filtering psychoanalytic notions of the interior self through Mondloch’s film theory and the creative work of such practitioners as Gaskell, Viola and Cooper, I locate a theoretical lens through which an exploration of what is, essentially, ambiguity, possible. In the immersive possibilities of video installation, I can locate ways in which this ambiguity may be reflected back to the viewer, and possibly reveal to the viewer their own denial of the lost Real within and subsequently, their own transience.
METHODOLOGY:
REFLEXIVE PRAXIS

This section outlines the merging of both creative and theoretical research – or praxis – in conjunction with the application of reflexivity, as a methodological and investigative approach with the outcome of visual creative work. It also details the genesis of my own praxis, identifying the first stage in defining the interior self and the lost Real that my visual creative work explores. This forms the starting point from which the rest of the research in based.

Praxis can be defined as the integration of both theoretical notions and creative research. Its origins reside with Aristotle and can be considered to be “a way of thinking about action and a way of acting on thought” (Crouch & Pearce, 2012, p. 40). Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s ‘philosophy of praxis’ can be described as “the unification of critical theory and revolutionary practice” (Oliga 1996, p. 217). Praxis in this sense can be viewed as a means by which the researcher can adopt processes that are both sensitive to, incorporate, and impact the broader social realm. Or as Christopher Crouch (2007) explains: “When the creative practitioner adopts praxis, it encourages the act of reflecting upon, and reconstructing the constructed world. Adopting praxis assumes a process of meaning making, and that meaning and its processes are contingent upon a cultural and social environment” (p. 113).

While there is built into every methodology a clear and structured framework within which to develop research, it has been my experience that a more flexible research method is appropriate to the process of making visual art. Indeed, I have found it difficult to locate a space in which the act of making can exist within the rigours of interrogative academic research. My aim is to demonstrate how, with reference to my own creative research, a reflexive praxis may allow for this flexibility. I am not arguing for the privileging of theory over creative practice, or of using theoretical ideas to prescribe a creative outcome. Nor am I arguing for a formulaic methodological approach that outlines how to make a creative work. Rather, with the aim of combining the research functions of the process-driven

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1 Much of the Methodology section in this thesis was generated for a conference held in 2009, entitled Creative Margins. Hosted by Curtin University of Technology, Perth, WA, the resulting paper, Merging theory and practice: Examining the psychoanalytic self, was published in 2010 in an online publication linked to the event, Provoking texts: New postgraduate research from the edge (see Appendix 2 for reference and retrieval details).
making of creative work, reflexive praxis may assume the potential of an integrative practice.

Investigative practices of theoretical research, I assert, support the communicative purpose of visual art. The issues this section addresses are threefold. Firstly, it defines and investigates praxis and reflexivity as a working methodological approach within the context of creative art. Secondly, it investigates creative work within the dual parameters of process and exhibition. Finally, it explores the use of reflexive praxis within the context of my own creative research of the interior self as a transient state and its relationship to the Real. The latter includes reference to the gap, or transient space apparent between the psychoanalytic states of self as outlined by the cultural theorist and Lacanian psychoanalyst Slavoj Zizek (Zizek, 2007b; 2010; Myers, 2003, p. 37).

I cannot separate my theoretical research and the communicative aims of my creative work from the process of making creative work. My creative practice uses predominantly installation, animation, video, and projection to visually articulate and inform my research aims. Broadly speaking, these are located in the area of the psychoanalytic self, in which the self is positioned as ambiguous, constructed, and constantly mediated by that which lies outside itself. In a psychoanalytic sense, this notion of mediation can be articulated by Zizek as ‘extimacy’, or the intimate made external (Zizek, 2007b, p. 43). Zizek’s thesis is based in the Lacanian ‘mirror stage’ of human psychoanalytic development (Lyden, 2008, p.50), in which the self becomes fully aware of its individual separateness from others and the world at large. This is when the self recognises its own image in its reflection, resulting in the sense that, as Lacan suggests: “We are...perpetually beside ourselves” (cited in Belsey, 2005, p. 62). At this point, a gap of loss and the unconscious desire to reclaim it is created within the self as well as between the self and the world around it. The ‘it’ that the self has lost and through which the gap appears is the part of the self that is beyond conscious reasoning, beyond language. It is ‘the Real’, or the world before it has been sliced up by language (Myers, 2003, p. 45). It is the psychoanalytic terrain of this gap that my research investigates.

I have found it difficult to locate a structured investigative framework that leaves room for research based in the ambiguous. In my view, reflexive praxis provides this space. Although it has been a complex task in finding this clarity, in my research, reflexivity is a vital component of the methodology of praxis. Creative work is intensely subjective, as it is the creative interpretation of the world as it is experienced by the artist. Yet it could be argued that the same could be said for any
other interpretation of the world, including any theoretical position. Any interpretation is irrevocably mediated by the world from which it has evolved. By employing the use of reflexivity, the researcher may monitor their own subjectivities as they are determined (or mediated) by the social constructs of their world. In this sense, reflexivity allows the researcher to “explicitly position themselves in relation to their objects of study so that one may assess researchers’ knowledge claims in terms of situated aspects of their social selves and reveal their (often hidden) doxic values and assumptions” (Maton, 2003, p. 64). In this way, the researcher/practitioner is able to track their own mediation within the social field and thus their own potential biases, in order to recognise how those limitations might influence their assessments” (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002: 222 in Crouch, 2007, p. 110).

Criticism of reflexivity as intrinsic to social models of research suggests it to often be undertheorised (Maton, 2003, p. 64). In terms of the inherent subjectivity and practicality of creative practice and the possibility of ‘narrative research’ (Crouch, 2007), validating analysis may also be problematic (Cladbinin & Connelly 2000; Stone 1993, cited in Crouch, 2007, p. 107). However, the rationale of these arguments loses merit if a theoretical analysis of both the researcher as subject within their field of practice as well as the subject of the research is addressed. Reflexively analysing the researcher as subject within his/her specific field of practice has been contextualised by Pierre Bourdieu (cited in Maton, 2003), whose approach points out that:

Each actor is relationally positioned within a field, this position determining his or her situated viewpoint of the activities of this and other fields. Thus, each actor has only a partial view of the game, acting accordingly. (p. 58)

Pels (2000) acknowledges this gap, suggesting that “all observations have their blind spot, and remain to some extent naïve with respect to their own point of departure” (p. 17), indicating that the influence and interpretation of the broader social field act as a distribution point from which individual reflexivity must eventually be released.

Zizek has also identified ‘gaps’ inherent within the reflexive self as a subject. As Zizek (2006) suggests, no one individual can stand completely outside of themselves, as they are part of a larger whole that includes, informs and is inseparable from who they are. Therefore no one individual can be a truly objective observer: “It is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my ‘material
existence” (p. 17). In defining ‘material existence’ in relation the gaze, Zizek writes: “Materialism means that the reality I see is never ‘whole’ – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it” (2006, p. 17). In the Zizekian psychoanalytic sense, the subject is a void (Myers, 2003, p.37), the impossible excess left over after Symbolisation. Applied to the notion of subjectivity within the parameters of research methodologies, this assessment of the subject adds another layer of complexity to its analyses. It is perhaps our incapacity, or unwillingness to acknowledge the blind spot, the stain of the gaze that indicates the void of the interior self that comprises the subject, that calls into question the possibility of not only ‘true’ objective research, but also its ‘subjective’ counterpoint. While this suggestion may complicate an analyses of a creative praxis model, it concurrently supports the aims of the creative research outlined in the dissertation, in which interior indeterminacy is the central focus of the work. As Zizek purports in relation to films that remove inner ambiguity from its protagonist by clearly stating their drives for the viewer, “By way of ‘filling the gaps’ and ‘telling it all’, what we retreat from is the void as such, which, of course, is ultimately none other than the void of subjectivity (The Lacanian ‘barred subject’)” (Zizek, 2001, p. 148). In creating works and in analysing the works of artists that reflect ambiguous interiority to the viewer, the ‘gap’ or ‘void’ is arguably made apparent.

In terms of reflexive praxis, the question as to whether it is possible to become a fully objective researcher, and thus provide fully objective research, is dismantled by the researcher’s implicit inclusion within the interpretation, or ‘reading’ of not only the subject of their research, but their position as a subject (in both senses of the word) within it. This suggestion is of particular relevance to the process of making creative work, which depends on the subjective response of the practitioner/researcher. A reflexive approach to research demands a level of self-awareness, or ‘self actualisation’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 4) that incorporates a seemingly infinite number of mediated variables. Therefore, it is possible that as a result of attempting to identify and acknowledge these variables, the researcher’s reflexive engagement assumes an endless, circulatory aspect, in which their work becomes “chronically sidetracked to attend to their own conditions of possibility” (Pels, 2000, pp. 17-18). However, Pels counteracts this inevitability by opening up the research enquiry into a broader field in which “[r]eflexivity is also something we must delegate to our friends, or rather: to our best enemies” (2000, pp. 17-18). This suggests that we can only be reflexive to a point, beyond which we must open our
research and our role as researcher to the community or social field around us. In this research, the application of reflexive praxis has been made evident via international conference presentations, the publication of academic papers, artist talks, and the collation of the research within this dissertation. It is also made apparent in the extensive public exhibition of creative works. In this sense, the viewer becomes an intrinsic component in the creative aims of visual work. In the works specific to this research, the viewers’ importance is in their position as transient selves, and between the work and the ambiguous interiority it aims to reflect. The relationship between the viewer and the work is thus explored in tandem to the content of the creative research throughout the dissertation, with particular reference to various exhibitions I have been involved in throughout my doctoral candidature.

Crouch (2007) positions the role of the researcher and of the use of a reflexive praxis as a research model in the broader social (institutional) field as a means of negating the possibility of narcissism in the researcher. The practical application of the creative arts, coupled with the reflexive engagement of the researcher in both their personal and wider, cultural influences, alleviates the possibility of narcissism as it forces individual engagement with institutional values, for as Freire [Freire 1972: 68] observes (in Crouch, 2007, p. 113), praxis takes place in the real world. In critiquing Bourdieu’s position on reflexivity, Loic Wacquant agrees with this contention, suggesting that: “For Bourdieu, reflexivity...uncover[s] the social at the heart of the individual, the impersonal beneath the intimate, the universal buried deep within the most particular” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 46). As such, the individual researcher/practitioner is inextricably connected within a broader social arc, in which personal revelations cannot be separated from the whole.

This position can be applied to the use of praxis within the creative field. Crouch (2007) argues that: “Praxis encourages a move away from the pitfalls of introspective narcissism and towards an analytical engagement with human interaction, and emphasises the necessity to clarify the inter-subjective circumstances of the communicative act” (p. 113). The inter-subjective circumstances that Crouch discusses are, in my view, made apparent in two key ways. Firstly, through the inter-subjective communication between the creative work and a broader audience through public exhibition. Secondly, via the act of multidisciplinary research, in which theoretical investigations, creative processes and the interrogation of works by previous artists ideas inform and support the practitioner/researcher’s own. These coalesce to support the creative outcome. To
expand on these ideas I now reflexively analyse my own position as a researcher/practitioner within the reflexive praxis model.

**Creative practice and reflexive praxis**

Unlike a semiotic or purely language-based critical platform, reflexive praxis includes the practice of making and the visual articulation of ideas as a vital component of research. The process of making creative work, or ‘doing’, is built into the foundation of reflexive praxis’ function as a research methodology. For me, this distinction has been imperative in working within the reflexive praxis model. However, in negotiating the complexities of creative research within this model, I have found it necessary to clarify some loose parameters in which this ‘doing’ is based, and determine how reflexive praxis supports the process-based creative component of praxis-led research. These parameters include the communicative function of the public exhibition of creative work, and the introspective process of making the creative work.

Visual work is made to communicate and be seen by others, yet it is often a result of something much less tangible. The subjective, introspective notion of intuition denotes that which lies outside conscious reasoning. Therefore, if one were to locate the intuitive within the realm of the unconscious, its definition is hampered by that which is, by its own nature, unknowable. To reflexively analyse one’s own intuition is therefore problematic. Arguably, in creative practice, unless room is given to the intuitive, to ‘unconscious’ visual exploration within reflexive praxis, the possibility of the creative outcome reflecting a prescriptive visual articulation of philosophical or psychoanalytic theory is high.

This is not the aim of reflexive praxis in terms of my own theoretical and creative research into the psychoanalytic self. I do not assume that there is any easy negotiation between the demands inherent in the process of making and the rigours of theoretical examination and public exhibition. Nor am I suggesting that creative practice is based solely in intuitive response. Given the responsibilities of reflexivity as imperative within the reflexive praxis model and the arguable potential for narcissism inherent in subjective-based work, it is perhaps beneficial that it is not. In this respect, within the reflexive praxis methodology it is perhaps important to reflect on the role of the subjective, which includes the intuitive. In terms of my own research into the lost Real of self in relation to creative practice and the unconscious as a site of intuition, it is pertinent to note Catherine Belsey's (2005) reading of Jacques Lacan, in which she states:
Human beings remain uneasy composites, the conjunction of an unreachable real organism and the subjects they become. The unconscious is not the real, nor the repository of the real, but the consequence of its loss... 'The real... is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious' (pp. 50-51)

Hovering at the interstice between the Real that is lost to it, and the Symbolic that helps define it, it is the notion of the self as an ‘uneasy composite’ that places it into the transient, ambiguous zone that my creative work explores. If, in the unconscious, we find the loss of the Real, it is perhaps worth accessing – and valuing – as a way in which to make creative work that explores this very issue.

In reflexive praxis, whilst theory and making have equal footing in the overall research methodology, is not to assume that theoretical research and creative research are binary opposites, delineated into objective versus subjective polarities. The role of reflexive praxis is an integrative application of the two. As Elliot Eisner writes: "Since what we know about the world is a product of the transaction of our subjective life and a postulated objective world, these worlds cannot be separated" (cited in Sullivan, 2010, p. 40). This view imbues the broader social field that reflexivity demands with the choices the practitioner makes during the process of making and the exhibition of the work (Crouch, 2007, p. 113). With particular reference to the practice-led research component of reflexive praxis, the notion of inter-subjectivity, or the merging of the objective and the subjective acknowledges the complexity of producing creative work. Within this idea there is space, perhaps, for “...possibilities whereby plural views, ambiguous notions, and uncertain outcomes become opportunities to see things differently” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 40). Certainly, this view is analogous to my area of research which explores similarly ambiguous terrain. In locating the gap, or the transient space between theoretical and creative research as well as between the objective and subjective worlds of the creative practitioner, I can recognise an inter-subjective parallel present within the psychoanalytic self. In this interior self there is, I assert, both the interior and the exterior, the inside and the outside, the intimate and the external, the subject and the self, and the dialectic blurring of the boundaries that set them apart.

It is my view that creative practice is as equally an intuitive practice as it is a communicative act. While I stress that these two things are by no means mutually exclusive, I have found it has been beneficial for my creative research to make this distinction. In terms of exhibiting creative work for public exhibition, decisions need to made by the researcher/practitioner that are determined by several external factors, one of which includes the site of the space or gallery in which the work will
Praxis in practice

While my creative work began as an internal response to my own unformed psychoanalytic interests, it has been in the ongoing creative process in conjunction with the theoretical research that I have found a way in which to tease them out. If the outcome of creative work is ultimately viewed as a communicative act, it is imperative to locate an understanding of one’s own work in order to determine what the work is attempting to articulate. Theoretical research has given me a tangible framework in which to ground ideas that are based in the ambiguous. In locating an apparent universality inherent within notions of the psychoanalytic self, my work becomes less about my own sense of self as it does about the psychological notion of being—the mediated self as intrinsic to the human condition. The research then informs the decisions I make regarding installation and exhibition that enhance the communicative possibilities of the work to a broader audience.

In a reflexive praxis, theory and practice are intertwined, each indelibly informing the other to such a degree that critically analysing my own creative work without the theoretical element that is imbued within it, is moot. In my view, the efficacy of reflexive praxis—defined by the merging of theory and practice—lies in the impossibility of doing so. While this perhaps implies that any reading of the visual work is somehow ‘incorrect’ without an implicit understanding of its theoretical element, this is not the case. What reflexive praxis offers is a tool through which the practitioner can interrogate, expand and develop their creative work, pushing it forward in a continual trajectory. By exposing the result of their inter-subjective creative work to the broader social field—the viewer—in the form of a reflexively considered public exhibition, the researcher is allowing multiple readings of the creative outcome to be assessed or experienced by its observer. A reading of the work that differs from its intention must not be considered a failure. If it is communicating something to a viewer, if it evokes an experience in the viewer, if it demands the viewer to negotiate its purpose, it could be considered a success. The fact that it is even considered in diverse ways is the intention. In asking an audience...
to make this consideration, it is imperative to be considerate in my own creative investigation. Arguably, without a reflexive analysis of each work, and the relentless investigation of ideas both creative and theoretical, there is the possibility of stagnation in the creative outcome. Without progression and communicative intent in the form of subsequently process-led creative research and the public exhibition of the creative result, it is possible that there will be nothing for the audience to consider. This dissertation is a demonstration of the reflexive model, and has been imperative in the development of my research praxis development.

In defining and investigating the integrative possibilities of reflexive praxis as a methodological approach in relation to creative work, and positioning within the creative aspects of practice the role of process-led research and public exhibition, I have been able to locate a flexible academic model that will form the basis of my continuing research.

As the methodology employed in my research, praxis demonstrates my use of reflexivity. This reflexivity demonstrates my negotiation of mediation for the viewer. What constitutes the self, is constantly reinterpreted or mediated. Social, ideological and intuitive information is motivating me to ask these questions. It is through creative practice and my engagement with reflexive praxis that I attempt to shed light on the transience I see as existing within the interior self in relation to the Real. Within this shifting space, the interior self hovers as neither one thing nor the other, yet both things simultaneously. By engaging with theorists such as Zizek whose writings examine similar concerns, and Mondloch’s model of double spatial dynamics in reference to the viewer, and artists such as Bill Viola, Anna Gaskell and Robbie Cooper (in whose creative works comparable notions of the interior self can be identified), I am able to position my praxis within an existing body of research. In contextualising my research within this broader field, I am able to integrate my intuitive, subjective interest in the esoteric notions regarding self that I am making visually manifest in my creative practice. As such, I am able to alleviate the creative outcome from the potentially narcissistic. Incorporating the inter-subjective nature of creative processes by investing the work within the parameters of the social—the role of the audience, the psychoanalytic notion of the interior self—is shown to be intrinsic to the human condition.
SECTION 1

THE INTERIOR SELF AS TRANSIENT: THE INTERSTICE BETWEEN THE REAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

1.1 The ambiguity of the interior self

My interest in the interior, ambiguous self arose when I started to explore the notion of the self as comprised of dual states: the mind and the body. As my creative work progressed, I found that my interest in exploring these ideas in sculptural form shifted to the use of projected video. This change in practice was an intuitive one and it was in my reflexive analysis that I began to make sense of why. My practice was beginning to reveal to me that the intangibility of the filmic body, recognisable yet ultimately illusory, corresponded to the more complex notion of the thinking, interior self as transient and shifting. I became aware of the blurring of the boundaries between mind and body, and of the gap or space in between which the self is in constant flux. This realisation led to the exploration of other boundaries that demarcate the thinking self as similarly shifting and ambiguous: waking and dreaming, here and not here, real and not real. I cannot differentiate whether this awareness stemmed directly from the theoretical component of my research, or from my creative investigations. In keeping with the integrative nature of reflexive praxis, this is appropriate (Crouch, 2007, p. 113). As the notion of the self grew more ambiguous, I began to search for outside sources from which I could tease out these increasingly complex ideas and enable my research to progress.

In the writings of Slavoj Zizek, I am able to locate a theoretical framework based on ideas that are as elusive and malleable as the notion of the ambiguous, transient and interior self that they attempt to interrogate. Due to the abstruse language used in the writings of both Zizek and Lacan it is unsurprising that locating clear definitions of the ideas investigated within their texts has proved problematic. For the sake of clarity, I have defined the key ideas as espoused by Tony Myers (2003), and with reference to Catherine Belsey (2005), as well as Zizek (1989, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2006, 2008, 2010).

My creative practice explores the psychological relationship of the self to itself. I am fascinated by the notion of the interior self as a labyrinthian world that is both deeply personal, yet inseparable from the external world in which it exists. Most of all, I am concerned with exploring the spaces between which the relationship of the self to its own interior world render the reality of self ambiguous, shifting and transient. It is this liminal zone of mystery, in which the self’s sense of itself
becomes blurred that I investigate the Real. As the Real is inseparable from the Symbolic Order of language (Myers, pp. 28-29), it is necessary to explore the inter-relationship between the Real and the Symbolic Order as a means of highlighting how the ambiguity and transience of the interior self occurs.

1.2 Lacan’s triad

Taking the psychoanalytic view of Lacan, as read by Zizek, there are three orders - positioned also by Zizek as a triad, or interwoven Borromean knot (Zizek, 2010) that comprise the thinking self (Myers, 2003, p. 20). All three orders form an inter-relationship that define the self, from the outside in or, as Zizek describes, “For Lacan, the reality of human beings is constituted by three intertangled levels: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real” (2007a, p. 8). That is, it is the external environment in which the self interacts that kick-starts the inter-relationship between the orders that subsequently work in conjunction to form the self. This model of thinking/meaning constructs the self as an interior world that cannot exist without the mediating properties of the external world. It is in the significance between the external world’s relationship with the self’s internal world that instigates the view of the self as standing at the interface between the Symbolic and the Real. At this interface, the self is thereby positioned between the realms of meaning and non-meaning, of the external properties of the world around us and how we make sense of it, and the lurking shadow of the impossible Real, the void that nullifies the world and the self within it. Negotiating the space between the Symbolic and the Real as the ambiguous space in which the self fluctuates forms the basis of this discussion. However, as a starting point, I provide a brief outline of each order, and the relationship of the Real to the Symbolic and the Imaginary. I explore the placement of creative practice within the triad, and how positioning my praxis within this framework is effective in supporting the communicative aims of my practice.

1.3 The Symbolic Order

The Symbolic Order comprises the social world: institutions, the law, the family, culture. According to Zizek, “the big Other operates at a symbolic level” (2007a, p. 9), infiltrating and mediating our identity, influencing and regulating our judgement, setting the limits of our behaviour, and thus determining, to a large extent, our choices. Most significantly, the Symbolic Order is the world created and quite literally defined by language. It is within language that we, as subjects, can make sense of our world and ourselves within it, and is therefore absorbed into the self as a kind of ideological and personal compass. It is the ‘signifying chain’ of language that gives literal voice to the self, providing both the liberating source of
meaning, and the boundaries outside of which meaning is lost (Zizek, 1997, p. 43; Myers, 2003, p 24). As such, it forever positions the self as experiencing the world indirectly – we can only know the world from the mediating control of the language that we have at our disposal to describe it. Subsequently, we can only know ourselves from outside of ourselves. As Zizek writes: “The fundamental paradox of symbolization…is that Nature can attain itself, its self identity, only at the price of radical decentrement: it can only find itself in a medium outside itself” (1997, p. 44).

Suffice to say, Lacan’s reading of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotics effectively binds the Symbolic Order together (Myers, p. 22) via a differential system that determines that no one ‘sign’ can be read in isolation to another. We cannot, for example, understand ‘death’ without understanding ‘life’, ‘mind’ without ‘body’, ‘dream’ without ‘awake’ et al. And even more specifically, according to Zizek (Myers, p. 23), we cannot experience these terms without the notion of absence and presence, in which the presence of one sign, eg. ‘life’, fills the void left by another, eg. ‘death’. Similarly, this idea ‘fills’ the psychological transient zone that separates the Symbolic and Real and in which the self hovers, with particular reference to the slippages between contradictory states of being that this notion infers, and in which my creative work is conceptually based. In terms of its relationship to the Real, the Symbolic Order, or the order of language, casts “a net over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane, which we here call the plane of the symbolic” (Lacan, cited in Belsey, 2005, p. 49). The fissure between these planes is the unstable ground on which the interior self teeters, the Real ever-present yet absent underneath the shifting, imperfect and incomplete Symbolic.

1.4 The Real

The Real is, unlike the Symbolic, a state of non-language, and thereby, non-meaning. It is a void, a nothingness that defies meaning and thereby positions it as forever ‘lost’ to the interior self; untamed, uncanny, unstable. Yet it is its very instability that informs its concurrent stasis. In remaining elusive to language – and meaning - and therefore to the Symbolic Order it is, perhaps, beyond mediation. It cannot be changed because it cannot be defined. Therefore, it stays the same. The Real is the world that exists before definition, yet also the excess left over by the limitations of language, avoiding Symbolisation (Myers, 2003, p. 27). Or, as Zizek purports, “the Real is simultaneously presupposed and posed by the symbolic” (1989, p. 191). The Real is thus bound to the Symbolic because of its very difference. Zizek clarifies the nature of this binding difference:
The Real is the fullness of the inert presence, positivity; nothing is lacking in the Real – that is, the lack is introduced only by the symbolization; it is a signifier which introduces a void, an absence in the Real. But at the same time the Real is in itself a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order – it is the lack around which the symbolic order is structured. The Real as a starting point, as a basis, is a positive fullness without lack; as a product, a leftover of symbolization, it is, in contrast, the void, the emptiness created, encircled by the symbolic structure. (1989, p. 191-192).

Belsey (2005) concurs with this assessment, suggesting that, in terms of the transient self’s relationship to the Real, “if we experience it, we do so as a gap, or alternatively as a limit” (2005, p. 14). Furthering the notion of the Real as indelibly linked to the Symbolic and thereby to the interior self, “the real is what our knowledge, individually or collectively, both must and cannot accommodate” (Belsey, 2005, p. 14). I would suggest that it is the impossibility of this conflict and the Real’s position to the Symbolic order that supports the notion of the interior self as transient and in constant flux, and that positions the ‘lost’ Real as an eradicable source of the self’s ambiguity. It is from this position that I situate my creative praxis.

Zizek maintains that the Real’s presence in the self, and its indelible link to the Symbolic, can be traced in trauma (Myers, 2003, p. 28). A traumatic event may declare itself as Real when it destabilises the self from the somnambulant lull of Symbolisation. This lull may occur when the exterior world of the Symbolic corresponds so utterly with the interior world of the self, that the self disappears, “reduced to a moment in the functioning of the Symbolic machine, the ‘structure without subject’” (Zizek, 2006, p. 30). This Symbolised effacement of self can be noted whenever we find ourselves ‘losing time’, for example, a car journey in which we have, for a moment, no memory of driving (Myers, p. 28). This is the moment of our disappearance into the Symbolic, which is discussed further in relation to the immersive nature of video installation, with particular reference to Robbie Cooper’s work, 

Immersion (2008 – present), later in this dissertation. It is the shock and jolt of the unpredictable Real, slashing through the Symbolic, in which the self reappears: a car near ours that veers off course, a blown tyre, an animal that runs in front of our vehicle. The cut of the Real in such instances, is the point at which the self, forced to make decisions on how to avert disaster, re-emerges from a state of Symbolised automata. In this moment, both the border on which the self hovers between each Order, and the necessity that the inter-relationship of each Order has within the interior self, is revealed.
While the Real’s relationship to the self as Symbolised can be affected from traumatic external sources, it is the lost Real within that perhaps allow for these events to be experienced as such, and subsequently implicate the Real as existing simultaneously within the interior self. The Real, like the Symbolic, does not exist exclusively outside the self. It “surrounds us [yet] it also inhabits us as the condition of our ex-sistence” (Belsey, 2005, p. 50). It is a part of the self whose inaccessibility is hidden by us, to protect us from the possibility of our own terrifying nothingness. Belsey suggests that it is the moment when we become aware of the void within that the psychoanalytic drive comes into play (p. 47). As such, related psychoanalytic terms including the gaze (McGowan, 2007, p. 11), the objet a (Zizek, 1992, p. 12), and extimacy (Zizek, 1996, p. 43) and its link to the uncanny (Dolar, cited in Cole, 2006, p. 393), are discussed throughout this dissertation, with reference to film theory and creative works. It is the Real’s phantom-like presence/absence within the constructed, Symbolic subject that renders the self forever on the precipice of meaning and non-meaning and therefore between the spaces of life and death, mind and body, real and not real et al that informs and drives my work.

In explaining the complex relationship of the Real to the self, Zizek draws heavily on an interpretation of Hegel’s notion of dialectical thinking (Myers, 2003, pp. 16-17). While Hegel purports that a synthesis of total understanding is possible if all viewpoints are taken into consideration (Myers, p. 16), Zizek maintains that it is the interruption of divergent viewpoints that allow the original notion to exist in the first place (Myers, p. 17). As he noted in his 2005 text, *Interrogating the Real*, “Hegel represents a ‘feminine’ logic of the not-all, in which there is nothing outside of phenomenal appearances but appearance is not all there is, precisely because of its ability to be marked as such” (Vanishing mediator, 2009). Positioning this idea within the realms of creative practice, Lacan suggests that, with respect to what we seek in painting, “we look for an indication that the imitation of the object also declares itself to be just that, ‘destroys itself, by demonstrating that it is only there as a signifier’” (Lacan, cited in Belsey, 2005, p. 85). Creative visual work intimates through its representation of some kind of mediated or skewed reality, that which lies under or within ‘mere’ appearance. The ‘lost real’ to which my creative research refers is this interior sense of lack, or ‘other’ that nevertheless exists within ourselves, just beyond our reach. Or as Belsey notes, “Art…neither delineates the real, nor acts as a substitute for it, but alludes at the level of the signifier to the loss of the real that is the cause of discontent in the signifying subject. All art, then, is a
place of desire" (p. 86). To this end, the psychological functions that surround, for example, the objet a and the gaze, and that deflect the nothingness of the Real within are important to investigate in relation to creative visual practice. Especially, perhaps, work that is consciously constructed to engage the uncanny sense of the ‘lost Real’ within the viewer.

1.5 The Imaginary Order

The Imaginary Order comes into being at the ‘mirror stage’ of human development, in which an infant first recognises its own reflection in a mirrored surface. In this moment of identification, there is a separation between the helpless, uncoordinated reality of the child, and the idealised unity of self reflected in its external image (Zizek, 2008, p. 118). This is the moment of the emergence of the ego, when the subject identifies as a ‘self’, and becomes as separate from itself as much as it is from those around it, and its repercussions persist throughout its lifetime. The space in between the reflection and the child’s body, or between the child’s idea of itself and the reality of itself, creates a divide that can never be truly reconciled, as the search for unity is derived from the division that created it in the first place (Myers, 2003, p. 22).

At the mirror stage of the Imaginary, Zizek suggests that “the feature to be emphasized here is that we are dealing with a kind of ‘freeze of time’; the flow of life is suspended, the Real of the dynamic, living process is replaced by a ‘dead’, immobilized image” (Zizek, 2008, pp. 118-119). Interestingly, in terms of a video-based creative practice, Zizek demonstrates this idea via the Lacanian metaphor of ego as the experience of the viewer witnessing the static image of a jammed film reel (p. 119). We identify with particular, fundamental images that form a picture of how we wish to be viewed, and that thereby provide an element of consistency to our world. Yet is the limited nature of those images that potentially ‘jams’ the capacity of the interior self to move beyond its ego. A visual example of the ego process can be seen in a creative video work entitled *Bridge* (2011)\(^2\) that was included in my doctoral culmination exhibition, *Transience* (2012). In this looped video short, a woman runs down the length of a bridge, yet never quite reaches the end. Entrapped within the continuous loop of the video, her journey is forever cut short, rendered endless and seemingly without meaning. It is in the repetition of the woman’s plight and subsequent suspension of meaning that we might find the immobilised ego of the Imaginary.

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\(^2\) *Bridge* (2011) is also discussed in Section 4 of this dissertation.
The significance of the Imaginary, for Zizek, is in its difference from the Symbolic. Zizek compares the level of the Imaginary to the Symbolic to that of an animal to man. The animal “remains stuck at the imaginary level, it is caught in the mirror-relationship to its environs while man is able to transcend this closure by being engaged in the process of symbolization” (p.119). Thus, in contrast to Imaginary fixity, in which the self creates and seeks “more and more instances of replication and resemblance in order to bolster up the fable of its unity” (Myers, 2003, p. 22), Zizek positions “the dialectic fluidity and mediating power of the symbolic process” (p. 119) as a possible solution to the stalemate. It is here, perhaps, that we can track both the emphasis of the Symbolic to the Real in Zizek’s writing, and why the self is positioned at their borders.
SECTION 2
THE INTERIOR SELF AND CONTRADICTION:
EXTIMACY, THE UNCANNY AND THE GAZE IN VIDEO WORK AND PRAXIS

Significantly, in terms of my creative practice and in the works of artists that are discussed later in this dissertation, it is the Real's position as the “immediate coincidence of opposite or even contradictory determinations” (Zizek, 1989, p. 193) that place it most effectively within the realms of the transient interior space that I am investigating. As Zizek notes, “The real is defined as a point of the immediate coincidence of the opposite poles: each of the poles passes immediately into its opposite; each is already in itself its own opposite” (1987, n.p.). In the Symbolic Order, contradiction is defined by the discrepancy of one thing from another, or when “the identity of each of the moments consists in its difference to the opposite moment” (Zizek, 1989, p. 193). In the Imaginary, “the two poles of opposition are complementary; together they build a harmonious totality” (p. 193), and are thus synthesized into the fantasy of complete unity (Myers, 2003, p. 28). Placed alongside these two orders it is, perhaps, the Real's function in supporting the coexistence of opposing terms (p. 27) that creates the complex inter-relationship of the self to the lost Real.

In terms of creative visual practice, “Jacques Lacan…claims that art as such is always organised around the central Void of the impossible-real Thing” (Zizek, 1999a, n.p.), which indelibly positions art practice if not in the Real (which is, of course, impossible), then hinting at it, moving around it, surrounding it. Creative visual work, like any Symbolic object, arguably cannot offer itself as a window into the unknowable Real as such. However, by offering the viewer a representation of a symbolised object that is itself an exploration of transient, psychological space, the engagement of the viewer’s own sense of the lost Real within just may be activated. It is the intention of my creative practice to reflect for the viewer this space of contradictions co-existing or ill-defined, intentionally ambiguous, uncannily hovering between that which is one thing and that which is another, yet simultaneously neither.

2.1 Anna Gaskell: *half life* (2002)

Freud (1919) suggests in his reading of Jentsch (1906), that the uncanny may be located in, for example, any “doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate” (p.
This ambiguity of what is and what isn’t can be clearly applied in relation to my research interests, and suggests, for me, a sense of the uncanny as a common thread in all of my creative work, and in the creative visual works I engage with as a viewer. Anna Gaskell’s photographic and video works in the exhibition *half life* (2002), outlined in a comprehensive catalogue edited by Matthew Drutt (2002), responds to this notion of the uncanny. I would suggest that it is worth investigating as an example of art’s flirtation with the Real as a site of the coexistence of opposing states/terms: life and death, absence and presence, meaning and non-meaning. In my creative praxis, this is the landscape in which the interior self exists. This is a reason for the self’s sense of transience.

Michael Rush (2005) writes that it is the “undelineated boundary between the known and the unknown [that] is characteristic of [Anna] Gaskell’s work” (p. 120), as seen in her looped video projection, *Untitled (half life)* (2002) (Figure 1). In this work, the body of a young girl floats under water. The tension of the piece alludes to the expectation that, although it appears that the girl is alive as she slowly opens and closes her eyes, she neither seems fully awake. She appears to be ‘gestating’ or close to drowning. Or as Drutt writes, “she floats, barely breathing, her hair unfurled behind her. This is a meditation, a suspension of disbelief, breathless, until finally her eyes open, the still image moving, the moment between living and dying” (2002, p. 26). She hovers in between, in a state of non-being, of Real-like presence and absence, life and death, in literal and uncanny suspension.

It is suggestions of the unknown, of the ambiguous such as those seen in Gaskell’s work that video artist Bill Viola refers to in relation to the viewer when he writes in *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House* (1995):

> Artists have known for a long time that the most interesting connections in things involve areas of low, or ambiguous information, so-called ‘gaps’ in recognition ...(Yet when the viewer asks) ‘What does this mean?’ they express a wish that everything be understandable. (p. 67)

This sentiment – this craving to understand – can be traced in Drutt’s discussion of Gaskell’s work, which he describes as “expressions of [her] manipulation of our need to reconcile meaning, and …successfully undermine our ability to do so” (2002, p. 19). To me, this suggests that it is the mediation, subversion or denial of the viewer’s desire for clarity such as Gaskell’s *Untitled (half life)* (2002) that can imbue in creative visual work the possibility of the lost Real of self. The refusal to provide clarity of meaning via images of indeterminate opposition is, in a small way, a negation of both the Symbolic need for order, and
the Imaginary’s need for the easy symbiosis of difference, leaving a gap, perhaps, that alludes to the unidentifiable, impossible Real. The grasping for meaning will invariably be made in the viewing of creative visual works that explore the ambiguous, and narratives will be imagined as a means of pulling together a seam of understanding. This, if nothing else, denies the possibility of a ‘true’ encounter with the Real. However, it is in the grasping itself that the Real of self may be sensed. Indeed, as Viola continues, “if one does not reject the mystery, one has quite a different response. One asks other things” (1995, p. 67).

Figure 1: Anna Gaskell, video stills from (Untitled) half life, dimension variable, 2001. (Drutt, M. 2002). (Exemption to Copyright, ss 40, 103C)

Praxis: Beijing train ride (2010)

The sense of the self as real but not real (or Real but not Real) was explored in a video work entitled Beijing Train Ride (Figure 2) that I filmed in 2010 during a residency in China earlier that year. Depicting the murky interior of a moving train during rush hour, a number of people sway, locked in close proximity to each other. The transient zone that is the train in motion, is mirrored in the blank faces of the passengers who seem detached not only from their fellow passengers, but from the earth itself as they fly through the darkened tunnel. Reinforcing this sense of the self as a state of untethered ambiguity, is the sudden appearance of brightly coloured
advertisements through the bodies of the passengers. In this moment the viewer becomes aware that the images they were seeing until this point were not the actual bodies of the commuters, but rather their reflection, captured in the darkened windows of the train. The sudden cut of the Real into the Symbolic that the abrupt appearance of the advertisements represent, reveals the bodies of the commuters as outside themselves, floating, like the gestating figure of Gaskell’s half life (2002), between states of reality. The installation of the work at free range in Perth, WA, reaffirmed this sense of dislocation. Having removed the audio from the original video, the work is a silent one. Free range, however, is situated opposite a train station, in which the noise of trains rattling past the gallery are easily distinguished. Captured on video in China and exhibited in Australia, the passengers of Beijing Train Ride (2010) are at once connected to the gallery site by the soundtrack of the real-time trains, and simultaneously disconnected for the same reason. I would suggest that it is in this disparity of contradiction co-existing, that we might locate for the viewer a means to communicate the notion of the transient, interior self.
*Beijing Train Ride* can be viewed by clicking the link below.

Beijing Train Ride video

![Image](image)

Figure 2: Beijing train ride, video stills from Beijing train ride, dimensions variable, 2010
Stella and Steve can be viewed by clicking the links below.

Stella video

Steve video

Figure 3: Stella, video stills from Stella, dimensions variable, 2011.
Praxis: Stella and Steve (2011)

I would maintain that the coexistence of opposing terms – and the subsequent sense of ambiguity this imbues in creative visual work – is a key ingredient of many of my creative works. I can locate an investigation into the role of contradiction in the interior self in, for example, two video portraits I had the opportunity to exhibit in a one-night-only exhibition entitled Bring Your Own Beamer (or BYOB, http://www.byobworldwide.com/) at Galleria Gallery in East Perth, WA, in late 2011.³

The portraits, entitled Stella and Steve (Figures 3 & 4), were selected from a total of thirteen video portraits I filmed in April, 2010. Each individual portrait comprised of a fairly tight, face-on close-up of a seated participant, in which the face and neck were visible in the frame. It was not until some months later when I reviewed the portraits that I was struck by the discrepancy between, in particular, two of the works. This discrepancy lay in the responses both participants' had to the filming process, and involved the notion of movement. Stella, seemingly unable to remain still throughout the filming, reflected a sense of barely-contained energy. Minor, head-tilting motions quickly ascended to a decisive shift forward in the chair on which she was seated, rendering her face large in the frame. As her hands ran their way through her hair, her desire to move, to leave, to not be still, separated her portrait from the other participants', whose responses were uniformly more conservative and quiet.

On the other end of the spectrum was Steve, whose portrait could be a definition in stillness. Barely blinking, Steve seemed to mentally leave the room during filming, awake yet removed, physically present but absent in every other way. This notion of the absence and presence of self, highlighted by the literal, physical reality of movement and non-movement, was never more apparent to me than when viewing these two portraits: Stella, whose kinetic energy is so vital and present that she nearly jumps out of the screen and Steve, whose meditative stillness renders him almost invisible. Coupled with the responses of these two subjects in the frame is, perhaps, the physical discrepancy of traditional photographic or painted portraiture and film or video. In both cases, the tension of contradiction is examined with respect to movement, via a medium (video) that is designed to capture it, within an exercise (a seated portrait) that invites its opposite.

³ Eventually, these two portraits became a part of my PhD graduation exhibition, Transience (2012). They were incorporated into a series of six works entitled Portraits (2012) that included four other video portraits. Three of these portraits included elements of animation, two of which were exhibited at Bring Your Own Beamer (2011).
Figure 4: Steve, video stills from Steve, dimensions variable, 2011.
It is the tension of the uneasy placement of movement to non-movement, as shown via the use of moving video to capture individual, seated portraits, and the responses of, in particular, Steve and Stella, that, I propose, invest in the work a sense of the interior self as similarly conflicted. In *Beijing Train Ride* (2010), the commuters are similarly placed between conflicting states of being; standing within a moving train, existing as reflection within the camera frame. Seemingly oblivious to being filmed, and reduced to the reflected image of themselves, the passengers are positioned as insubstantial and passive. As a consequence, they are submissively unaware of the transient zone in which they exist. The *Steve* and *Stella* (2012) portraits offer themselves as a rather more aware, and certainly less accepting counterpart.

Like Stella and Steve, the woman in Anna Gaskell’s *half life* (2002) gazes directly at the viewer. This gaze immediately implicates the viewer, suggesting an awareness of her situation that she nevertheless fails to contest. In *half life* (2002) the interior self as on the border of the Symbolic and the lost Real, as neither one thing nor the other – here-but-not here, neither dead or alive, awake nor dreaming – is revealed as a kind of floating, somnambulant acceptance. It is, perhaps, the realisation of what already and always is, while the video portraits are an investigation into how the self battles to shield itself from this ‘reality’, i.e., the reality/impossibility of the lost Real within. Rather than hovering between opposing yet co-existing states of being, *Steve* and *Stella* are shown, via their own physical responses, and highlighted by the use of animation, to move in and out of that which is ‘real’ (read: ‘Symbolic’), and that which is not (read: ‘Real’).

The animation of both participants’ was designed to underscore this shift – this individual unease of difference co-existing – rather than accept it, or efface it. Stella runs her hands through her hair in a quick, once-only gesture. Yet this seemingly innocuous response is looped over and over again, the editing technique insinuating a sense of inner unease bordering on the neurotic, as she appears to repeatedly wipe something of herself away. The animated ‘version’ of Stella creeps quickly over her ‘real’ image, one semi-transparent ‘self’ visible through the other. The dual presence of each ‘self’ moves at a slightly out-of-sequence rate, rendering the ‘layering’ of Stella ever more complex, and ever more anxious. Steve, by contrast, in all his unblinking stillness, is literally erased by white pastel chalk. His image gradually devolves into a mask of nothingness, painted ‘real’ by the heightened marks of graphite pencil that suggest rather than detail a nose, a hair line, the corner of an eye. The animation lays bare the psychic disappearance of the
subject, in a controlled environment that demands its physical presence. In both cases, I constructed the portraits as a visual representation of the self’s interior struggle to cope with the lost Real of self – a knowledge that, as noted by Belsey earlier, we “both must and cannot accommodate” (2005, p. 14).

2.2 Extimacy

As indicated above, the role of contradiction as a key in which to understand the self as a transient and ambiguous state is, perhaps, essential in understanding the slippery notion of the lost Real within. The tension between co-existing states can be found in Zizek’s reading of Lacan’s notion of ‘extimacy’, a word comprised of two words: external and intimacy (Myers, 2003, p. 41). The state of extimacy suggests that we are unable to see ourselves from within ourselves, only through the mirror of the Symbolic Order (Lyden, 2008, p. 50), of reality as constructed by language (Myers, 2003, p. 41). In this way, the individual becomes open to Symbolic mediation. As Zizek writes (cited in Myers, 2005, p. 42), “in pronouncing a word, the subject contracts his being outside himself; he ‘coagulates’ the core of his being in an external sign. In the (verbal) sign, I as it were – find myself outside myself, I posit my unity outside myself, in a signifier which represents me” (Zizek, 1996, p. 43). Extimacy is a term directly derived from Jacques Lacan’s notion of ‘extimate’, or the “excluded interior” (Cole, 2006, p. 393), and the terms are interchangeable. Dylan Evans (1996) describes ‘extimate’ and its relationship to the transient, or lost Real of the interior self, as:

The way in which psychoanalysis problematizes the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained. The real is just as much inside as outside, and the unconscious is not a purely interior psychic system but an intersubjective structure (‘the unconscious is outside’).…The center of the subject is outside: the subject is ex-centric. (p. 59)

In this way, we may view the lost Real of self as extimacy, placing the transient self once again in the gap between contradictory states: inside and outside, absence and presence, et al. For me, the notion of extimacy is of particular importance for my creative praxis. It influences not only the decisions I make regarding the content of my work (see Monster, below, and later in Section 3, with reference to my process of animation), but also in relation to the experience of viewing creative video work, which is discussed in Section 4. The latter asserts an analogous link between the body of the viewer and the filmic body that is intended to replicate the extimacy of the interior self and, by extension, its transience.

The lost Real of self has been investigated in this research as comprising of the coexistence of opposing terms, and the notion of extimacy as a means of the self separating from the Real, entering the Symbolic and thus positioning itself as outside itself (and therefore removed from the Real). These ideas have a deep resonance in the creative choices I have made and continue to make. A work entitled *Monster* (2012) (Figure 5) that I made for an exhibition of the same name, held at the Oats Factory Gallery, Perth, WA in June, 2012, was as an opportunity to explore these ideas. I continued to use the technique of layering ‘real’ footage and its animated counterpart that I developed for the *BYOB* (2011) exhibition the previous year. The exhibition asked the contributing artists to make a work that explored a literal, fictional or psychological notion of ‘the monster’. This theme allowed me to approach what I perceive as the psychological torment of a psyche that is split between that which is there, but not there, or sensed yet unknowable, and that which is present, yet removed from the self. Or in other words, between the lost Real of self, and the Symbolic ‘reality’ of self.

For this work, I staged a film set reminiscent of the *Portraits* (2012) series. As such, the participant, who I shall refer to as Erin, was seated facing the video camera with a blank wall behind her. This time, however, I filmed the participant from a longer distance, intentionally creating more space around her body. The other major difference between Erin’s portrait and say, Stella’s or Steve’s, was that in this portrait, Erin was given clear instructions on what to do and when. In short, she was asked to ‘perform’. In one, long shot that I discussed with Erin beforehand, I filmed a ‘straight’ video portrait that, on my signal, morphed into something else. I later edited the long shot, splitting them into two layers, one of which I animated. In the resulting work, the notion of the self as ambiguous and two things at the same time is taken at a literal level. Referencing the gothic horror novel, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson, a twitching, kinetic Ms Hyde extracts herself from her benignly oblivious Jekyllian counterpart. The split complete, the doppelgangers are, however, semi transparent versions of themselves, incomplete without the presence of the other. The analogous relationship of the interior self to the Real and the Symbolic is evident in this work, and marks a clear indication of its correlative relationship to the notion of extimacy.
Erin can be viewed by clicking the link below.

Erin video

Figure 5: Erin, video stills from Erin, dimensions variable, 2012.
2.3 The gaze

The shifting dichotomy of the self as both inside and outside itself can also be viewed in Lacan’s theory of the gaze as outlined by Todd McGowan in relation to the Real (2007). The gaze resides outside of the self, meaning that it is determined by the relationship between whatever it is that we are looking at (i.e. the objet a, the object cause of desire), reflecting back to us that which we want to see. It is the ‘objet a’ – or the object cause of desire – that the “fill[s] the gap created by the fact that the real is lost to the subject” (Belsey, p. 48 - 49). In this respect, the objet a of the gaze is that which stands in for the Real (Zizek, 1987, n.p.), the “nothing that is to be found behind the veil” (Belsey, p. 48). Expanding on this idea, Zizek (1992) writes:

If we look at a thing straight on, i.e., matter-of-factly, disinterestedly, objectively, we see nothing but a formless spot; the object assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it ‘at an angle’, i.e., with an ‘interested’ view, supported, permeated, and ‘distorted’ by desire…[As such] the objet a is always, by definition, perceived in a distorted way, because outside this distortion, ‘in itself’, it does not exist, since it is nothing but the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion (p. 12).

Given this, we are, in a sense, the masters of our gaze, as we unconsciously predetermine what it reveals. Yet in this predetermination, the self is revealed as obscuring the reality of the gaze as a ‘blank spot’ that the self fills in via their own desire. In Zizek’s reading of Lacan, “the gaze is ‘what is lacking, is non-specular, is not graspable in the image’” (McGowan, 2007, p. 11). And, as discussed in relation to extimacy, in which the self is separated from itself and determined by that which lies outside it, “even when the subject sees a complete image, something remains obscure: the subject cannot see how its own desire distorts what it sees” (p. 11). Within this lack, or gap – this transient space – there is the Real (p.11). In terms of my creative praxis, I am interested in how creative work might reveal the relationship of the viewer to the gaze and thus suggest the notion of the Real within that it conceals. The gaze as “a device to open a ‘non-place’, the pure oscillation between emptiness and fullness” (Dolar, 1991, p. 20), suggests, for me, that within these notions of the gaze, the interior self as transient might also be explored.

We can see the complexity of the gaze in cinema and video art, in which the object of the gaze looking back at us can take the form of a person. In what Winston Wheeler Dixon describes as “the gaze of the screen” (1995, p. 2), the ‘look back’ or ‘fourth look’ (p. 7) is a look imagined by the viewer in both the glowing ‘eye’ of the cinema screen itself, and in field of the filmic subject, eliciting a sense of unease in
being surprised in our act of voyeurism (pp.7-8). In this instance, the gaze of the viewer becomes inextricably linked with the gaze of the filmic object/subject, manifesting in what Zizek (1992) describes in relation to film as “the couple power/impotence” (p. 72). By this, Zizek explains that:

The gaze denotes at the same time power (it enables us to exert control over the situation, to occupy the position of master) and impotence (as bearers of a gaze, we are reduced to the role of passive witnesses to the adversary’s action). (p. 72)

This mastery/passivity is further complicated by the role of the gaze as a stain, or ‘blank spot’, that arguably becomes apparent to the viewer at the moment of the filmic subjects’ ‘look back’ (Wheeler Dixon, 1995, p. 2). For McGowan (2007), it is the “point that disrupts the flow and the sense of the experience – within the aesthetic of the film, and it is the point at which the spectator is obliquely included in the film” (p. 8). Within this ‘blank spot’, this moment of nothingness exposed, resides the Real as lost to the interior self (Belsey, 2005, p. 49), revealed for the viewer at the moment of their inclusion.
*Untitled* can be viewed by clicking the link below.

**Untitled video**

Figure 6:  Untitled, video stills from Untitled, dimensions variable.
Praxis: *Untitled* (2011)

I have employed the ‘look back’ of the filmic subject in several of my video works, including the *Stella* and *Steve* (2012) portraits discussed earlier. Another work in which this complex relationship of the gaze and the filmic subject was explored was in an animated video work, *Untitled* (2011) (Figure 6), which was shown in an exhibition entitled *Crash at free range* in Perth, WA, in 2011. The setting of the work is a well-known city mall in the centre of Perth. Unusually, the mall is empty of people. To add to this strangeness, the space has been animated. The buildings that line the mall have been rendered as shimmering, flickering versions of themselves; solids made unstable. In the middle of this uncanny public space, a tiny figure emerges. Walking purposefully down the centre of the mall, the figure (who I shall refer to as Jon) becomes increasingly larger as he strides directly towards the camera, towards the viewer. Jon’s determined journey down the centre of this uncertain space becomes a stabilising force, and the focal point for the viewer. Holding what appears to be a protest sign in his hands, he stops walking only when he gets so close to the camera it appears he might crash through it. It is only when Jon finally stops that the viewer can see that the sign he carries is blank, and that his gaze is directed squarely at them. Holding the gaze of the viewer for a second or two, the scene ends and the loop repeats. The viewer is drawn into his repeated march down the strange, silent, shimmering world of the animated mall.

The intention of this work was in exploring the relationship of the viewers’ gaze to the notion of the Real that the gaze conceals. Interpreting the work with this in mind, it is possible that what Jon is protesting is his role as the objet a, the object cause of desire, fueling the gaze of the viewer. The endless looped repetition suggests that this is a futile protest yet one that, in Jon’s returned gaze, the viewer is implicated. The blank sign, devoid of language, of the Symbolic, becomes a testament to the implications of the gaze as an empty distortion of the presence/absence of the Real. In staring into the camera lens and through to the viewer beyond it, Jon recreates this notion of the gaze as a challenge; a challenge that, as evidenced in the looped repetition of his protest, can never be overcome.

2.4 Anna Gaskell: *turns gravity* (2010)

It is interesting to note the power of the gaze returned even in the event of its denial for the viewer. In a series of unsettling photographic images of formally-dressed youths in a snowy landscape, Anna Gaskell’s *turns gravity* (2010) invoke a set of scenarios that have been framed to obscure; bodies only half visible, faces turned away or hidden from the viewers sight. Deliberately ambiguous, the viewer is
left to imagine the nature of the boys’ interaction. This immediately invests the viewer into the scene, as they are left to draw their own conclusions from the disquieting images (Swan, 2010). What embeds in the works the sense of unease is, for me, the removal of the boys' faces from view, either by choice of framing, or shadow. In particular, *(Untitled) turns gravity #2* (Figure 7). In this photograph, a chain of boys stand in a scrappy line that reaches from the distant, indistinct background and moves towards the viewer until it ends at the figure in the foreground. The viewer is immediately implicated in the scene, almost as if they are the next inevitable link in the chain. Filling almost half the frame, it is the boy in the foreground that the viewer is asked to face. Yet within the frame, it is only the boys’ torso that is visible. The only discernable evidence of his face is in the appearance of his chin. The boy stands in front of the viewer, confronting their gaze yet denying them his own. As the viewer, the lack of visible evidence to support the gaze of the boy is implicated in their own looking. The ‘look back’ of the boy as a gaze denied is no less diminished as it is filled in by the viewer as a here-but-not-here reality, felt, like the Real it conceals, as an absent presence.

![Figure 7: Anna Gaskell, archival pigment print on aluminum, (Untitled) turns gravity #2, 121.9 x 152.4cm, 2010. (Gaskell, A. 2010). (Exemption to Copyright, ss 40, 103C).](image)

**2.5 The uncanny**

In the gaze we find the self in extimate – determined by that which lies outside itself, held away from the impossible Real next to which it nevertheless teeters. In film, and by extension video art, we find a way in which to explore notions of the lost
Real of self via both the content of the image and the place of the viewer in relationship to it. Patrick Fuery (2000) positions the notion of ‘extimate’ in relation to the filmic body, suggesting that:

film can give the body this extimacy by taking what is deeply intimate (our corporeal identities and qualities as they are formed by ourselves, and the interplay of this sense and the cultural contexts and exchanges) and exposing it as even more closely tied to what we see as part of our subjectivities. In this sense, film makes the body more intimate, and yet at the same time has the capacity to render the body as something alien and strange to behold....Film...can defamiliarise the body, giving it qualities that have been unseen and unthought of before, and still construct the body as something we recognise as part of the known. (p.72)

Fuery (2000) demonstrates that the editing possibilities of film (and digital video) allow for the manipulation of the filmed body, creating a ‘known but unknown’ quality to the image. In this way, the body on film becomes a conduit to the notion of the interior self as a transient, ambiguous state.

It also places the editing possibilities of video as a means of generating images that are imbued with a sense of the uncanny. Philosopher Mladen Dolar (cited in Cole, 2006) makes the link between the notion of extimacy and the uncanny (and therefore to the lost Real) clear, writing that the uncanny “points neither to the interior nor to the exterior, but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening...The extimate is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; it is unheimlich [uncanny]” (p. 393). The uncanny, in this instance, is that very recognition of the unfamiliar and strange, that we nevertheless identify as knowable to us. As Freud suggests (1919), we may recognise something as uncanny when it reflects back to us in some indirect way, that which we repress (p. 244). The possibility of edited film or video to manipulate the ‘known’ body, made epic in scale, or/and intimate beyond everyday exposure or experience, is what forces upon the viewer a brush with not only their own extimacy, but with that which this position represents: the lost Real within, teetering on the border of an interior self that stands outside itself to exist. In a conversation between installation artist Mike Kelley and art critic Thomas McEvilley (Morley, 2010), Kelley describes his definition of the uncanny in relation to his creative work, in Freudian terms, stating:
When we are confronted with something that is beyond our limits of acceptability, or that threatens to expose some repressed thing, then we have this feeling of the uncanny. So it is not about getting in touch with something greater than ourselves. It’s about getting in touch with something we know and can’t accept – something outside the boundaries of what we are willing to accept about ourselves. (p. 204)

As such, it is arguable that the Real of the self – the impossible third of the Borromean knot that comprises who and how we are, and that we paper over via the processes of our Symbolic and Imaginary Orders’ – is, by its nature, uncanny. And that subsequently, that which strikes us as weird or unsettling, is perhaps an unconscious reminder of “the uncanny menace of the real” (Kay, 2003, p. 57) that is at once lost to us, and yet remains an inseparable part of us.

**Praxis: Clouds (2009)**

*Clouds* can be viewed by clicking the link below

[Clouds video](#)

![Figure 8: Clouds, video still from Clouds, dimensions variable, 2009.](#)

The notion of the uncanny and the Real informs much of my creative work, such as a video work entitled *Clouds* (Figure 8) that I completed in 2009 and had the opportunity to exhibit three times during my doctoral candidature: at *Breathing*
Space (2011); in conjunction with Greenhill Gallery at the inaugural exhibition of Grey Door in Subiaco, Perth (2011), and as a part of my PhD graduation exhibition, Transience (2012).

Clouds (2009) takes the notion of extimacy, in which the interior self is constructed outside itself, as a central tenet by positioning the viewer simultaneously outside and within the image of a huge, breathing sky, heavy with twisting clouds that slowly rotate around the sun. As a viewer, the self stands in front of this uncanny sky, observing safely from the ‘outside’ of the image. Yet at the bottom right hand corner of the image, a familiar, solitary telegraph pole stands. As the sole witness to the sky above, the telegraph pole tethers the work to the everyday, to Symbolic ‘reality’. It alludes to the notion of the Ruckenfigur, a term most often associated with the German Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich (Koerner, 1985).

Figure 9: Caspar David Friedrich, painting, Wanderer above the sea fog, 94.8 x 74.8cm, 1818. (Friedrich, C.D. 1818). (Exemption to Copyright, ss40, 103C).
Friedrich’s overwhelming and eerie landscapes often include an object or figure in the foreground that represents the viewer, such as *Wanderer Above the Sea Fog*, (1818) (Figure 9). Art historian Neil Hertz argues that such a figure or object offers the viewer a site of entry into the artwork, suggesting that, as David Elkins’ surmises, “a viewer’s eye is naturally attracted to stable places, places where, if this were real life, a person might stand” (2004, p. 96). Leading on from this, the viewer might then make the leap into imagining themselves as that object or figure (p. 97). In the case of *Clouds* (2009), the telegraph pole at the base of a frame overwhelmed by an enormous, uncanny, breathing sky, becomes this stable focal point of entry for the viewer and then, taking it one step further, becomes the viewer.

Elkins’ continues, “What interests Hertz is the way that the two viewers, the real one and the imaginary one ‘inside’ the picture, form a pair,” and is what links this idea so completely with the notion of extimacy. “As ‘painter-beholder’, Hertz drifts back and forth...from his actual place outside the picture to his place inside the picture” (2004, p. 97). A similar sense of the viewer as being both ‘here’ (in the exhibition space) and ‘there’ (within the context of the artwork in which they are engaged) can be reviewed with specific reference to video art later in this dissertation (see Kate Mondloch’s theory of ‘double spatial dynamics’, (Section 4).

As a video work, *Clouds* (2009), I would assert, offers different ways in which the notions of the painter-beholder, or the *Ruckenfigur*, is reinforced. The figurative stability of the *Ruckenfigur* object within the frame in relation to the overwhelming nature it foregrounds, is a key to its efficacy as a focal point of entry to the viewer. Yet unlike painting, video is a medium designed to capture movement and therefore, to represent the potentially transient, the shifting, the unstable. However, in *Clouds* (2009), the figurative stability of the telegraph pole in relation to the breathing sky above it is enhanced by the method employed to create the work. Rather than use a video camera in which to film a cloudy sky, I used instead a photographic image. Any movement perceivable in *Clouds* (2009) was a result of the digital manipulation of the sun – and the sun alone – along a timeline. The rest of the video was literally, a still image. The figurative stability of the image of the telegraph pole as the focal point through which the viewer might enter the work, is perhaps reinforced by the physical process used to create it.

Conversely, *Clouds* (2009) offers another way in which the body might be referenced in the work. It can be viewed as the sky itself, removed from an interior space and floating, like ephemera, in the exterior world. The body of the viewer
when engaging with the work may be rendered similarly ambiguous. As Joseph Leo Koerner writes of Friedrich’s *Wanderer* (1818):

The *Wanderer* makes our own place as viewer of the landscape rather unstable. We never can be sure whether we stand with the *Rucktenfigur* on the solid summit in the foreground, or whether we float in space with the clouds. (p. 152)

In *Clouds* (2009), it is both the sky and the telegraph pole, both the uncanny and everyday, the familiar and the strange that marries the work to the body and the self, and all its dualistic ambiguity. By encouraging entrance into its uncanny projected world via the use of the *Rucktenfigur* in the form of the telegraph pole, *Clouds* (2009) may offer itself as a site in which the viewer may hover between the Symbolic certainty of the telegraph pole, and the void-like Real of the breathing sun. In this way, it is my intention that the viewer may replicate the transience of the interior self that this work represents.
SECTION 3: 
THE INTERIOR SELF AND THE LOST REAL IN PROJECTED VIDEO AND PRAXIS

I realised quite early into my praxis that the self as transient and ambiguous must be reflected in the creative processes I employed to communicate these ideas. The use of video, animation and projection has emerged in my practice in the last few years in tandem with this aim. Moving from a three dimensional practice based in sculpture to a predominantly two dimensional one was an intuitive process, initiated at the early stages of my interest in the interior self. Projected video, created by a light source hitting an object/screen, is literal ephemera, existing only when the projection mechanism is turned on, and disappearing to nothing when it is turned off. The intangibility of projection is an obvious metaphor to the ambiguity of the interior self, whose negotiation of the lost Real renders it transient and forever uncertain. In this notion, there is a clear reference to the allegory of Plato’s cave in *The Republic* (cited in Grau, 2007, p. 409), in which a group of captives are compelled to watch a series of shadowy projections that they mistake for reality. As Sean Cubitt suggests, “the simile of course is an analog for a more contentious argument, that the phenomena we all sense are merely reflections – projection – of a higher reality which exceeds them as much as our world exceeds its shadows on the wall” (cited in Grau, 2007, p. 409). While the link between the illusionary projections and the Symbolic, and ‘higher reality’ and the Real can be argued, it is perhaps the obverse reading, i.e. the ‘higher reality’ as the Big Other – as God, as Law – that position the allegory most effectively within the Real. Zizek (1999b) posits, in his reading of the film *The Matrix* (1999), the possibility that, rather than the Real as lying beyond the illusion, there is instead only multiple virtual and Symbolic realities. In this sense, there is no ‘higher reality’:

The Real is not the ‘true reality’ behind the virtual simulation, but the void which makes reality incomplete/inconsistent, and the function of every symbolic Matrix is to conceal this inconsistency – one of the ways to effectuate this concealment is precisely to claim that, behind the incomplete/inconsistent reality we know, there is another reality with no deadlock of impossibility structuring it” (Zizek, n.p.)

As such, the efficacy of the projected image as a medium for my creative practice is, perhaps, less in its capacity to allude to a ‘true reality’ based in either Real or Symbolic forms. Instead, video projection underscores the Real's
impossibility, or the Real as void within the interior self. As Zizek asserts, “in cinematic art, the field of the visible, of representations, involves reference to some central and structural Void, to the impossibility attached to it” (1999b, n.p.).

The psychoanalytic notions of projection as a medium serve the conceptual aims of my praxis well, as it speaks to the relationship of the work to the viewer, as well as the content of the work itself. In a video streamed lecture, Zizek (2010) discusses the notion of the ‘reality of the virtual’ as the production of real effects via something that does not yet fully exist, “which is not yet fully actual” (2010), linking it to Lacan’s triad as the Imaginary virtual, the Symbolic virtual and the Real virtual. In focusing on ‘Real virtuality’ in relation to film, there is the ‘Real Real’ or the ‘core Real’, where we find two levels of Real virtuality. It is the second level that most interests me in terms of my research. At this level of the Real of Real virtuality, which Zizek explains in relation to cinematic content, there is contradiction. Specifically, it relates to that which presents as one thing, yet articulates its opposite affect via a kind of ‘virtual texture’ that is hidden in plain sight throughout the narrative of a film. The capacity of film to hold two opposing affects simultaneously is clearly relevant to my research of the transient self. It is film’s ability to generate “unexpected affects at meaning” that links it to Lacan’s notion of the Real as “the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious” (cited in Belsey, 2005, p. 51). That is, it is precisely these ‘unexpected affects’ that engage the viewer’s sense of “what we don’t know that we know” (Zizek, 2010). As such, the viewer’s response to the filmic ‘affects’ position those images in Real virtuality. In this way, it can be seen that it is the inter-relationship between the viewer and what they're seeing that engages a sense of the Real: the representation of a reality that activates an “unknown known” in the viewer’s unconscious. In video projection, it is arguable that I might harness the psychoanalytic interpretations of the medium that can be read in both the content of the work, and in the viewer watching it.

3.1 Video and animation

After several years, I introduced drawing into my creative process, simultaneously realising that the reason was that I was in conflict about how the tangible or physical body could be integrated into my creative investigation. I

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4 Also analogous to the psychoanalytic reading of projection, as Sean Cubitt notes in reading Melanie Klein, is an individual who transfers or ‘projects’ their innate, self destructive tendencies to another person or object (cited in Grau, 2007, p. 408). These tendencies are in turn indicative of the ‘death drive’ noted earlier by Belsey (2005), and the advent of the Thing that “marks the place where the real was” (p. 50) in the interior self.

5 The ‘reality of the virtual’ is described by Zizek in opposition to ‘virtual reality’, the latter of which of which he seems to have a low opinion. As he explains in the lecture (2003): ‘I think virtual reality is a rather miserable idea. It simply means “let us reproduce in an artificial…medium our experience of reality”. As opposed to, perhaps, interrogating why and how we experience reality. Or rather, what lies underneath our experience of reality.
consider the act of drawing, in which the body is viscerally involved in the process of making, a more tangible physical act than using the digital technologies of video. And although I agree with video artist Bill Viola, who describes his relationship to the camera as “part of my body. It is intuitive and unconscious” (Viola cited in Rush, 2005, p. 157), there is a distance between the physical body and the process of making when capturing the world from behind a camera. In a practice that is exploring the ambiguities present within the self, the act of drawing made the complexity of this relationship apparent. My decision to create hand-drawn animated video projections clearly resonated with this realisation.

3.2 Mike Parr and William Kentridge: the ‘deathly trace’

I can locate a similar desire to make manifest the artist’s body in the necessarily representative nature of art-making in the work of Mike Parr. Moving from a strongly performance-based practice, Parr’s charcoal self portraits, including Ablaut Self Portrait and Abaxial Self Portrait (1983-84) (Figure 10), could be viewed as a reaction to the distancing between the living, breathing corporeality of live performance, or ‘self presence’, and the digital media used to capture it in the form of photo documentation:

The living reality of presence be-came implicated in the ‘deathliness’ of the trace, the remnant, [and the creation of Parr’s charcoal self portraits] an attempt to breath life into such deathly photographic traces [and also] preserve the presence of the artist in the sense that it leaves a physical trace of the artist's gestures. (Coulter-Smith & Magon, 1988, p. 22)
Charcoal, being easy to wipe away and spread, yet forever leaving something of a ‘trace’ behind in its erasure can also be seen in the charcoal video animations of William Kentridge, such as *Weighing and Wanting* (1998) (Figure 11). And as it did for Mike Parr, Kentridge’s use of charcoal in the process of creating animations using photographed images of reworked drawings, provided a key to negotiating the technologies used to capture the physical act or process of making. In terms of animation, or moving images, Kentridge’s process, which he discusses below (“William Kentridge ‘Anything is possible’”, n.d.), has particular resonance with my own work methods:

When I tried to draw on a computer, its inner logic was very much at odds. The computer had to do with cloning, replication (things staying the same), and effect. You could put an effect that looked like charcoal animation onto the computer (aware of that not being a necessary part of the process, but a kind of decoration added on), whereas the smudge of a charcoal animation is not decoration. It’s something you can't avoid; it's there whether you like it or not.

This desire to remove from the film, and from the process of making it, the possibility of replication or ‘cloning’ evident in creative digital technologies by using drawing mediums such as charcoal, has very much driven my own creative process.

The animation method I employ is, as a consequence of my desire to tangibly draw and ‘breathe life’ into both the making process and its digital outcome, deliberately low-tech. Avoiding the option of using digital animation applications, I use graphite pencil, pastel chalk and charcoal to draw directly onto individual

Figure 11: William Kentridge, drawing from the film *Weiging...and wanting [Soho with head on rock]*, 123.2 x 160cm. 1997. (Kentridge, W. 1997). (Exemption to Copyright, ss40, 103C).
frames of printed video stills. Initially, the aim of this process was to reveal a coalescence of both my own physical body and the filmic body, yet further reflexive research has revealed a deeper complexity that speaks about the absent/present inter-relationship of the Symbolised self to the lost Real within. My use of reflexive praxis (in which the intuitive desire to draw was integrated, and became paramount to the conceptual aims of my research) enabled me to identify an additional layer to the notion of the interior self as a transient and overlapping state, the result of which is made visually apparent in the creative result. Conceptually, it is the animation of the ‘real’ that interests me in this process.

3.3 The Act: Symbolic suicide

By ‘real’ here, I am referring to the physical reality of the moving body, as opposed to the lost Real of self, although the analogous relationship between the concept and the selected mediums is, as mentioned previously, apparent and indeed, form an essential component of my creative work. In discussing the drawings of Mike Parr, Coulter-Smith and Magon (1988) explore the notion of the ‘trace’ in relation to not only the physical, bodily gestures of the artist’s hand and the relationship of drawn works to digital mediums, but also to consciousness, or ‘being’ and its link to presence. The trace in this instance refers to that part of the self that is forever lost to itself, inhibiting any sense of ‘self-presence’ (p. 22). The all that is ‘forever lost’ may refer to the lost Real, the pre-language subject, ‘free’ of the constricting net of the Symbolic Order. The desire to remove oneself from the overarching net of the Symbolic can be seen in Zizek’s notion of the ‘Act’. As Zizek writes, in the Act, the Freudian death drive becomes the ‘second death’, following the initial death of the Real subject via its Symbolisation, in which “symbolic death, the annihilation of the signifying network, of the text in which the subject is inscribed, through which reality is historicized – the name of which, in psychotic experience, appears as the ‘end of the world’, the twilight, the collapse of the symbolic universe” (2005, p. 33). Thus, the Act is a complete rejection of the Symbolic Order by the individual, who chooses self-annihilation – or ‘aphanisis’ – as a means of denying the status quo. Ultimately, the Act is an act of revolution, holding the tenuous promise of firstly returning the individual to a state of the Real, (read: death, or ‘Symbolic suicide’), through which they pass to be reborn into a radically changed Symbolic Order, (Myers, 2003, pp. 59-60). The possibility of rebirth or reinvention via this transition from the ‘Symbolic’ to the ‘Real’ and out the other side, once again speaks about transience. Of moving in between states of ‘being’ in a conscious way, of making a decision to abandon ones’ own sense of self
— capitulate to Freud’s death drive (Freud, 1922, pp. 1-90) — as a means of becoming something else. It suggests a liminal or ‘betwixt and between’ space in which all is given up with the promise of transforming into something or someone else.

3.4 Anna Gaskell: *Future’s Eve* (2001)

In the Act, or aphanisis (Myers, 2003, pp. 59 – 60), the self is only ‘free’ of the Symbolic order that mediates it when it rejects it entirely. And the only way that this seems possible is through self-annihilation.

A projected video work by Anna Gaskell entitled *Future’s Eve* (2001) (Figure 12), demonstrates the potential of video art to investigate Zizek’s ideas of ‘Symbolic suicide’ (Zizek, 2005, p. 33).

![Figure 12: Anna Gaskell, video still from Future's eve, dimension variable, 2001. (Gaskell, A. 2001). (Exemption to Copyright, ss40, 103C).](image)

In *Future’s Eve* (2001), Gaskell has filmed a view from the bottom of a grave, into which earth is continuously thrown and removed (or reversed), by disembodied hands. The installation space in which the film was projected at New Langton Arts, San Francisco, USA (2001) was utterly black, small and tight. In a review of the exhibition, Diana Gaston suggests that, in creating such an immersive environment, the viewer finds that “instincts take over and we can only read [the] sequence as we experience it physically” (2001, p. 16).

The choice of the artist to create a space in which the viewer becomes extremely aware of their physical senses is of particular interest if one were to view the image of the grave as a void. In this sense it could be a metaphor of the Real, into which the unseen self is ritualistically buried and unburied – born and reborn. In
reference to this work, Gaskell says, “I imagine someone in that grave. Not necessarily a dead or dying person, but something emerging and being given another chance or a first chance to become something new, something different” (cited by Gaston, 2001, p. 16). The grave becomes a site of the Real, a “place of discovery where all rules are indefinitely suspended” (p. 16), into which the self falls, giving up all that is known and leaving the viewer to physically experience that space in the ground “with anticipation or dread” (p. 16.). It is this duality of both anticipation and dread that interests me when critiquing Gaskell’s projection. The kind of ambiguity this image evokes is a fitting metaphor for the ambiguity of the liminal, interior self, as it shifts from state to state, from Symbolised to Real, from the dual emotions of anticipation to dread. The use of video projection as a means of exploring this theme can be linked to Zizek’s view that the idea of the Real can be glimpsed in the illusion. As Zizek (2000) writes:

Deprived of the Real, of that which resists the simple integration into our common reality (symbolization, integration into our universe), reality itself turns into a malleable, indefinitely plastic texture that, precisely, loses the character of reality and turns into a fantasmatic effect of discursive practices. And the obverse of the same paradox also holds: the ultimate experience of the Real is not that of a reality which shatters illusion, but that of an illusion which irrationally persists against the pressure of reality, which does not give way to reality. (p. 671)

In a sense, Gaskell’s ‘illusionary’ grave becomes the Real, disappearing once the projector is turned off, but ‘irrationally persisting’ as an experiential space, as a kind of shadow of Zizek’s Real.

3.5 Bill Viola: Stations (1994)

The sense of the potential for redemption as found via a type of conscious decision, or Act, to ‘fall’ and thus be reborn – as explored in Zizek’s notion of aphanisis, or Symbolic suicide – can be viewed in the work of Bill Viola. Viola’s work has arguably maintained a lyrical quality that taps into spiritual notions of the self (Rush, 2005, p. 152). In his work Stations (1994) (Figure 13), an installation of a series of three, computer-controlled, five-channel videos are projected onto large pieces of rectangular granite hanging on a wall, which are in turn reflected on mirrored surfaces on the floor. The images are of bodies as they seemingly fall through the air or in water. The bodies are seen falling in slow motion, and the viewer is subject to an almost overwhelming sensory experience as they are encompassed by loud sounds and intense colour of a “grand scale [which] contribute to a cinematic experience of man immersed in nature” (p. 155).
The unmediated, unknowable and uncontrollable aspect of the Real is reflected in the sensory overload of the installation. It is the act (or the Act) of falling that is embedded in the imagery, I would suggest, that links it most directly to Zizek’s notion of Symbolic suicide: the person depicted in the projection floats, seemingly in between worlds, or in between states of being, neither landing nor starting at any given point. The work, I propose, can be interpreted as the transience of self embodied by the filmic subject – the self imagined in the body of a floating man.

In terms of the use of projected video to reflect the notion of the interior self as transient, it is perhaps useful to consider Viola’s *Stations* (1994) and Anna Gaskell’s *Future’s Eve* (2001) once the projector and/or computers are turned off. The filmic body would no longer subsist. All that would remain, in Viola’s *Stations* (1994), would be the granite slabs and the mirrored floor, reflecting the emptiness of an image that no longer exists. Only the materials remain as tangible, Symbolic ‘reality’. In Gaskell’s *Future’s Eve* (2001), only the darkened room would remain as a void, a (Real) point of sensory zero: a Real that is at once absent and present in the gallery space, as it is in the notion of the interior self.

As seen in Mike Parr’s charcoal drawings of recorded works, and in the projected works of Anna Gaskell and Bill Viola, I would assert that the importance of materials and the mode of representing visual work takes on a crucial role in
investigating ideas of the interior self and the Real that is lost to the viewer. That Mike Parr’s charcoal self portraits eventually moved from the original drawings to the production of laser-printed representations of those images is of particular interest to me in relation to my creative practice, and has a direct link to the notion of the Act as a portal into a drastically altered Symbolic reality. In removing the tangibility of the charcoal medium to the laser copy, Parr is commenting on the “journey into the freedom implied by the trace, especially when we realise that, unlike the photocopy, the laser copy opens up the image to electronic manipulation, mutation, and change” (Coulter-Smith and Magon, 1988, p. 22). Likewise, the drawings I subsequently scan into a computer editing application allow for a similar possibility of manipulation, although the drawings themselves remain unaltered. In placing each discrete drawing – made so by the deconstruction of a contained film into thousands of frames of single, hard-copy prints – into a timeline, and reconstructing the (modified) version of the original film, I am attempting just that. I am re-creating the original footage with a shadow of the trace (of the lost Real) implied in the scanned drawings. It is, as noted by Zizek (2005) earlier in this paper, referencing the ‘not all’ of appearance (“Vanishing mediator,” 2009), and the part of the interior self that exists, yet does not.
The animated version of *Dis/Integrate* can be viewed by clicking the link below.

Dis/Integrate video

Figure 14: DisIntegrate, video stills from DisIntegrate, dimensions variable, 2008-2009. Animated version.
The first time I used this method of animation, the resulting work, *Dis/Integrate* (2008) (Figure 14), exhibited for the first time at Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA, comprised of an animated video projected opposite the real footage, which was displayed on a small monitor. In this work, I was exploring these questions of the ambiguous interior self by asking whether the animated ‘version’ of the body was any less or more mediated than the body represented in the ‘real’ footage. The real footage captures the real body, unadorned and undeniably present, yet removed by the extended arm of technology – separate, cold, a documentation or voyeuristic surveillance of a person in an undefined black space. Yet in the animated version, the body is distorted. It is rendered ‘less real’, less recognisable as a ‘real’ body: an example of Zizek’s notion of extimacy, in which the intimate Self is externalised (and consequently mediated, or edited), to make sense of itself. As Zizek (2006) writes:

The consistency of the Self is….purely virtual; it is as if it were an Inside which appears only when viewed from the Outside, on the interface screen – the moment we penetrate the interface and endeavour to grasp the Self ‘substantially’, as it is ‘in itself’, it disappears like sand between our fingers….At the level of material reality (inclusive of the psychological reality of ‘inner experience’), there is in effect no Self: the Self is not the ‘inner kernal’ of an organism, but a surface effect. (p. 206)

However, it is this footage in which the body is perhaps more saliently visible via the charcoal and chalk mark-making of the creative process. It is in my discernible bodily involvement that arguably ‘personalises’ the piece. As with Mike Parr’s laser prints of charcoal drawings, the animated version requires more technological intervention in the making process than the ‘real’ footage. Yet it is perhaps the animation, that imbues in the work a certain corporeality.

Upon reflection, I can determine that this interest in the ambiguity of ‘mediation’ to the self, or of what is and what is not ‘real’ maintains a strong link to the notion of the self as standing at the interstice between the Symbolic and the Real. The mediating properties of the Symbolic, in which our world, both interior and exterior, are determined by the language we use to describe it, is nevertheless imbued with the absent/present void of the Real, and the psychological processes we use to negotiate it. It is this uneasy, psychological relationship that I aim to communicate in *Dis/Integrate* (2008) and the works I’ve made to date.

In film/video, the body is mediated in the ephemera of film, untouchable, yet purely representative of what is ‘true’. In this way, it is the Symbolised reality of the
person it has captured. The hand-animated ‘version’ of this ‘truth’ renders the same body uncannily – familiar, yet ‘alien and strange to behold’ (Fuery, 2000, p. 72). Hovering over the real body as an altered, jittery doppelganger, the animation becomes the body of the Real – or rather, the body of the lost Real.

**Praxis: Rooms I-V (2012). Hand-colouring and the lost Real**

In further investigating the possibilities of the animation technique described above as a way in which to explore the lost Real of self, I began to look at other texts whose visual imagery, for me, suggest a similar level of the uncanny. The 1939 MGM classic film, *The Wizard of Oz* (Figure 16) had particular resonance. Shown in my childhood as an annual event on television, at a time when the reality of ‘Betamax’ was still a few years away, I anticipated my yearly dose with great excitement. Much like Dorothy, who journeyed from the sepia-tinted, black and white world of Kansas to the Technicolor world of Oz, I was permitted to visit my neighbours’ home – who, unlike my Luddite-like family, were in possession of a colour tv set – and immerse myself in the hallucinogenic adventures along the yellow brick road. In contrast to my friends’, whose fascination for all things Oz seemed to involve a terror of the green-faced Wicked Witch of the West, it was the colour of the world that held me captive.

![Figure 15: The Wizard of Oz, film still of Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz, 1939 (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer). (Exemption to Copyright, ss 103C).](image)

Although rendered fantastically strange with its animated scarecrow and tinman, its evil flying monkeys and its land of ‘munchkins’, it was the heightened sense of reality that came courtesy of Technicolor that for me, painted this world as ‘other’. In Dorothy, we have a link to Kansas, to all that is Symbolically familiar and

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6 While there is room here to discuss this phenomenon within the context of Jean Baudrillard’s (1981) writings on the hyperreal and the simulacrum of reality, it is not the focus of this discussion. What interests me is the
safe. Dorothy is the audience, reporting back to her loved ones all that she has seen at the end of the film. In recognising an everydayness in Dorothy and her dog, Toto, it is Technicolor’s capacity to drench them in saturated colour that render them as extimate, and that position them between what is real and what is not. In broad terms, it is not Oz that, in all its strangeness, is nevertheless a Symbolically constructed world of rules and institutions complete with tyrannical monarch, but rather colour that represents the lost Real for Dorothy and, by extension, for the viewer.

The childhood reaction to colour that I initially experienced via The Wizard of Oz (1939), was replicated when I was introduced to hand-tinted sepia photographs, probably at around the same age. In particular, a photographic portrait of my mother (Figure 17) enthralled me. Taken in the late 1950’s in Perth, Western Australia when my mother was barely out of her teens, the hand-tinted still depicts a blue-eyed, brown-haired, rosy-cheeked figure that, to my five year old eyes, had very little to do with my mother at all, least of all because it failed to depict her actual colouring. The woman in the photograph was a misty, romantic heroine from time gone by. She was otherworldly. While my childhood response may have been influenced by the shocking realisation that my mother was once young and that once upon a time I did not exist in her world or at all, that sense of otherworldliness when looking at the portrait persists even now. I am fascinated by the capacity of the application of artificial colour to render a ‘real’ representation of an object or figure strange – to defamiliarise the familiar. Computer applications abound that enable the manipulation of colour in photographs and video, among which Technicolor might be included. But in terms of my own creative practice and the notion of the self as hovering between states of contradiction that it explores, it is the process of hand-drawing over a tangible printed image that most effectively invokes this ambiguity, with particular reference to my video animations.

implications of colour for my creative practice, and within the Lacanian/Zizekian psychological notion of the Real (1992; 2005). A philosopher of consumerism, Baudrillard suggests that only artifice is at the heart of reality (Poster, 2001). In Lacan, it is the psychological Real that, while lost to the speaking subject will, as Belsey notes, reclaim us in the end (2005, p. 6)
Figure 16: Photographer Unknown. My mother's portrait. [Photograph]. (Photographer Unknown, late 1950's). (Exemption to Copyright, ss40, 103C).
Domestic (Rooms I) can viewed by clicking the link below.

Domestic (Rooms I) video

Figure 17: Rooms I-V, video stills from Domestic, dimensions variable, 2012.
When I first began to explore the animation technique that I have described earlier, I made high contrast, charcoal-based works, in which the figure could easily appear and disappear, absorbed into a smudge of soft blackness, only to reemerge into brilliant whiteness (such as *Dis/Integrate* (2008)). As I continued on, I thought it might be constructive to interrupt the black and white palette and see how the work developed using colour. Removed from the original colour through the process of printing out each individual frame in greyscale, my videos were always going to be monochrome unless I decided to interfere with them. And much like early film and photographic processes, it would require a hands-on method in which to colour them. With the Technicolour bizarreness of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and the fairytale strangeness of my mother’s portrait, I determined to create a kind of hand-tinted photograph that moved.

The first of these animations was *Domestic* (2011) (Figure 15), featuring a subject I will refer to as Prita, which became part of a series of hand-coloured works that collectively were entitled *Rooms I-V* (2012). I began to make decisions about the type of colours I wanted to introduce. Rosy pink cheeks were a prominent feature of the images I studied from the 1950’s. This novelty was also in keeping with the imagery of a nationally famous, oft-played 1956 Australian advertisement for Vegemite, which promised to ‘put a rose in every cheek’.

As both the era of the advertisement and its connection to Australia mirrored the circumstances of my mother’s portrait, it seemed apt to use the feature of rosy cheeks as a starting point. The soft colours of the childhood fairytales I used to read and have read to me emerged as the dominant palette: sky blue, pale yellow, forest green and, as a final nod to my mother’s portrait, brown for the hair. Another feature of the hand-tinted photographs I’d studied was the selective use of colour within the image. Along with flushed cheeks, a detail of clothing such as a flower in the hair, or perhaps an entire dress seemed common markers for colourisation, while other areas were consistently overlooked.

Like the hand-tinted portraits I loved, I was also discerning

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7 *Rooms I-V* (2012) is a work that encompasses five separate animated videos, with the working individual titles: *Domestic, Hallway, Stairs I, Stairs II* and *Bridge*, and can be viewed separately in the attached DVD. Filmed in one day, the works were split into vignettes before any animation took place. *Bridge* (2011) is the only vignette of the set that is sans colour.

8 The ‘We’re happy little Vegemites’ advertising campaign for Vegemite spread was spearheaded by J. Walter Thompson, starting in radio in 1954 before transferring to television in 1956 in black and white form. Discontinued in the late 1960’s, it was remastered, partially colourised and reintroduced in the late 1980’s. This was the version in which the ‘rosy cheeks’ mentioned in the jingle first appeared visually. It was broadcast on and off from 1991-2010 (‘Happy Little Vegemites’, n.d.). To view a colour version of the advertisement (NylonStudios, 2010), go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qj78bUnUUmU

9 Some portraits were more heavy-handed with the use of colour than others depending on the colourist, the country in which it was rendered, and on the fashion of the time. Tinted photographs spanned from the mid 1800’s, and remained the only way in which to produce colour photographs until the introduction of Kodachrome colour film by American Kodak in the mid twentieth century. My mother’s portrait is dated as the late 1950’s. Rather aptly for
in what I chose to colour within the image. For *Domestic* (2012), in which the face of Prita was prominent in the frame, I coloured cheeks, hair, eyes, lips, her shirt, and hints of skin. As the only other natural living thing in the space, I also chose, at the last minute, to colour the green leaves of the pot plants sitting on the mantelpiece behind her. Much like the backgrounds in which the subjects’ of hand-tinted portraits sit, the room in which Prita wandered was otherwise left untouched.

In the remaining three video animations that I chose to hand-colour for the *Rooms I-V* (2012) series, Prita’s face was less visible and oftentimes not visible at all. In these instances I selected to, for example, feature the doors lining a corridor (*Hallway* (2012)) (Figure 24), colouring them a bright yellow. The doors became the markers of Prita’s journey down the corridor, leading her to her next door, to her next room and, much like the empty promise of Dorothy’s yellow brick road, to what's next. In the remaining two animations that contained colour, it was the sky blue of Prita’s shirt that became the thread through which the viewer could trace her journey. Although the greyscale print-outs of these video animations lacked the sepia tones of the tinted photographs I was hoping to replicate, I think there remains a suggestion of the same. There is certainly a contrast between the smudgy, indistinct grey world of the print-outs and the bright fairytale pastels that hover over it and over Prita, marking her as other, as strange within a strange world. The result was intended to be indicative of the tinted photographs of the era and, most importantly, the uncanny, interior landscapes of the lost Real of the interior self.

The animation method I have used in creating many of my video works, whether coloured or monochrome, is in rendering this effect. Drawing over the surface of an existing, printed image – an image that is itself a copy of an existing video – is the deathly trace of the absent/present Real of self left behind. Projected video as a means of supporting this effect is an essential element of my creative research. In terms of positioning the self between the ambiguous psychological space of the Symbolic and the Real, the notion of contradiction co-existing has provided the space between which the self floats, both for the filmic body within the work, and for the viewer.

In projected video, I explore the possibility that the simulated images of the body, of the self, are perhaps as illusory or unknown, as the transience of self they could represent. It is interesting to note that, while Gaston discusses Anna Gaskell’s work in relation to the physical experience of the audience, (“we can only read the

my research, it can therefore be viewed as the moment when the process of colour photography was at the precipice of changing over into something else.
sequence as we experience it physically”, (2001, n.p.), Bill Viola concentrates on his own intuitive process as the focus of the work (Viola, cited in Rush, 2005, p.157). Ironically, perhaps, the difference in approach evident in these two artists’ work is appropriate, given the subject matter of transience and the shifting quality of self that both works allude to. I am interested in both these ideas, which is why both artists are important to my research. It is the intention of my creative research to explore the creation of physical, tangible, experiential spaces in which to explore mediated, intangible notions of self. It is thus necessary to investigate further the notion of experientiality in video art.
SECTION 4

EXPERIENTIALITY: THE INTERIOR SELF AND THE LOST REAL IN THE IMMERSIVE VIDEO SPACE

In an experiential space, the viewer becomes part of the space and an observer within the space. They are at once enveloped in a specific frame of reference or mood as determined by the creative work, yet at the same time, are positioned as an objective viewer. In this way, the viewer’s experience becomes a replication of the transient state of the interior self that the work explores. This is so far as there is the possibility for a merging of mind and body, a corporeal as well as an intellectual exchange. Bill Viola (cited by Ilies, 1995) speaks of this experientiality in relation to his video projection work, saying:

Art has always been a whole-body, physical experience. This sensuality is the basis of its true conceptual and intellectual nature, and is inseparable from it…In my work, the visual is always subservient to the field, the total system of perception/cognition at work. The five senses are not individual things, but, integrated with the mind, they form a total system and create this field, an experiential field that is the basis of conscious awareness. This is the only true whole image. (p. 101)

The experiential space, as a space consciously created by the artist to have an immersive effect on the viewer, could thus be viewed as highly mediated/Symbolised. It also positions the artist within this realm of the Symbolic via the communicative aspect of creative praxis. The question of how this mediation takes effect in the viewer is thus worth exploring as, I would suggest, it relates to the interior self as similarly mediated by the Symbolic order. Drawing from the mediation of cinema (and similarly, video art installation, in which I situate my own work), there is a possibility for empowerment in the viewer, the potential to “transform its whole way of becoming through an encounter with what it is not” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 37). While this may well be true, I would suggest that, rather than transforming the viewer via ‘what it is not’, it is within the mediation of such art practices as immersive video art installations that the viewer may encounter that which it always/already is. Roland Barthes describes the immersivity of mainstream cinema for the viewer, describing the experience as:
letting oneself be fascinated twice over, by the images and the surroundings – as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies. (cited in Mondloch, 2010, p. 19)

Kate Mondloch describes Barthes’ position as indicative of the inter-relationship between the viewer and video art, suggesting “screen-reliant installations…make viewers reflexively aware of this condition, persuasively (and persistently) reminding them of the necessarily embodied and material nature of all media viewing” (2010, p. 19). With this idea in mind, it is thus not the intention of video art to attempt to absorb a viewer into the work so thoroughly that the ‘reality’ of its production (the projector, the self-consciously darkened space, the space in between the viewer and the projected image, the image itself as ephemera et al) or indeed, their own bodies, become lost. Indeed, in keeping with Barthes’ observation and Mondloch’s view, it is perhaps the presence of these very mechanisms that allow for a greater immersivity of the viewer. It is from this position that the installation of my creative work, along with its content, explores the relationship of the viewer’s interior self to the notions of transience my research investigates.

4.1 Robbie Cooper: *Immersion* (2008 - present)

In the ‘embodying’ nature of media viewing, in which the self ‘forgets’ itself and ‘disappears’ into the world of whatever it is they are watching, there is a correlation to the automaton described as the fully Symbolised self (Myers, pp. 28-29). This level of immersivity for the viewer to media can be traced in the work of British artist, Robbie Cooper (Cooper, n.d.). In an ongoing series of video portraits started in 2008 entitled *Immersion* (Figure 18), Cooper films individual subjects through a one way mirror whose design was inspired by the documentary-maker Errol Morris’s ‘Interrotron’, in front of which they engage with video games, the internet and television programmes.
The camera, invisible to the subject, captures the immersion of the viewer in their electronic worlds. Their faces, positioned directly in front of the camera and therefore directly in front of the gallery viewer, reveal the range of emotions experienced by each subject throughout their engagement. While such an insight may give some clues into the individuality or character of each participant, it is the relationship of the subject to their digital worlds that showcase the immersive nature of watching screen-based media. Isolated from other people, the participants’ interaction with the screen is without distraction. It is here that, lost in the electronic environment in front of them, a hint of Symbolised automata is revealed. However, our position as the viewer of a screen-based piece of art, consisting of people watching screen-based media, becomes a self-reflexive exercise in stripping bare our own relationship to the screen. Cooper’s *Immersion* (2008–present), while a fascinating and at times equally hilarious and poignant series of video portraits, arguably negates the viewer’s immersion, repelled by the uneasiness of its underlying message. This idea impacted the reflexive analysis of my creative practice, resonating in particular with the *Portraits* (2012) (Figure 26) series I installed as a part of *Transience*. It is discussed in Section 5 of this dissertation.

### 4.2 Kate Mondloch: double spatial dynamics

The embodiment of the self as Symbolic automata present in Cooper’s *Immersion* (2008 – present) is, perhaps, indicative of the disconnection between the Real and the Symbolic within the interior self; a split that effaces the self, that renders it non-existent. However, it is the viewer’s ability to sense and experience the mechanisms of production that surround them that not only ‘save’ them from Symbolised annihilation, but once again position them as standing on the border
between the Real and the Symbolic. To this end, Mondloch’s (2007, p. 24) model of the ‘spatial dynamics of spectatorship’ describes a ‘doubleness’ of the viewing experience in relation to video installations that further attests to the in between space the interior self inhabits. “In a curious amalgamation of gallery-based spatial experimentation and political aesthetics, this model of spectatorship proposes that viewers be both ‘here’ (embodied subjects in the [tangible] exhibition space) and ‘there’ (observers looking onto screen spaces) in the here and now” (Mondloch, 2010, p. 62). This new double spatial dynamic radically reinterprets the conventional ways that screen-reliant spaces have been described and experienced. The model refers to the notion that as members of the hegemonic ‘society of the screen’, our constant interaction with screened images has invisibly divided us from tangible reality, creating a dislocation from both the real world and the worlds represented on the screen (Mondloch, 2007).

As such, the viewer, when interacting with my video installation works are “both here and there—or, perhaps more ominously...neither fully here nor there” (Mondloch, 2007, 33). I would suggest that this question of presence can perhaps also be linked to notions of the ambiguous, transient and interior self and its relationship to the lost Real, as an unfomed and shifting condition that is neither absent nor present, conscious or unconscious, inside or outside, yet all of these things simultaneously. In such a reading, the double spatial dynamic outlined by Mondloch (2007) in relation to the viewer’s experience of video installation is perhaps also appropriate in the case of creative work that is investigating these notions of ambiguity and liminality in the self. In between the viewer’s experience of the darkened void of the video installation and the nebulous projected image in front of them, there is an opportunity for the viewer to sense the liminal zones of self that form the basis of my conceptual concerns. This was the aim of works such as *Dis/Integrate* (2008), whose immersivity was similarly ambiguous, positioning the viewer between, and at times floating on top of, the projected image in a darkened space, and that will be extrapolated on further, below.

In an experiential space, the viewer becomes a part of the space in the sense that they are enveloped in a specific frame of reference or mood suggested by the creative work. They thus become a part of the work. Yet, as an objective viewer, they are simultaneously positioned as an observer of it. This is not to suggest that other creative mediums such as painting would be less effective in achieving this aim. Seminal Abstract Expressionist, Mark Rothko’s enormous paintings of luminous colour, in which the paint seemingly hovers over the canvas,
demonstrates this point. Arguably, the washes of light-filled colour work in tandem with the scale of the canvas to envelop the viewer in the spiritual truths that Rothko is trying to communicate (May, 1998, n.p.). As Rothko states: “I paint large pictures...because I want to create a state of intimacy.” (n.p.). In my creative research, I aim to create a similarly immersive environment, focusing perhaps on creating a state in the viewer in which intimacy is inevitably bound to the external (extimacy), and in the transience of the interior self that this idea infers.

Thus, as they negotiate the space between their own body and the filmic body when immersed in these experiential spaces, it is my hope that the viewer’s sense of psychological transience will be activated. That is, the work may exist in a highly mediated space, yet the viewer’s response to the work is their own. As Judson (1995) writes of the experiential video installations of Bill Viola:

> Anyone entering one of Viola’s installation spaces will encounter more or less the same visual and auditory environment as anyone else, orchestrated, of course, by the artist. Yet the actual experience of one of these works is as if the revelatory moment of extended duration, so characteristic of Viola’s installations, had been one’s own. (p. 30)

Whether this positions the viewer’s experience of the work as deeply personal or, conversely, as deeply mediated (or perhaps more tellingly, as both at the same time), is arguable. In terms of reflexive praxis, the immersive nature of experiential installations may reveal the inter-subjective communicative capacity of creative work. For my own creative work, it provides an intermediary space between the viewer and the work in which notions of the interior self as hovering at the interstice of the Real and the Symbolic might be revealed.


*Immerse* Spectrum Project Space, Perth  
*Ummm…the Articulate Practitioner* Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Fremantle

The notion of the conceptual aims of my creative practice as contingent on the experientiality of the spaces and screens where they are viewed have influenced the reflexive analysis of my works. As a case in point, the video installation *Dis/Integrate* (2008) (Figure 14) was exhibited in two separate venues. Initially installed at Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA, in 2008, the exhibition space did much to influence the way in which the work was presented. An awkward and small room at the top of a narrow set of stairs, the space determined an immediate intimacy, a closeness that began to dictate the communicative function of the
installation. I installed one small, recessed screen on the wall opposite the doorway at about eye-level, from which the ‘real’ footage was played. This was the first video work the viewer encountered upon entering the space. This acted as a focal point in which the viewer could be drawn into the installation and from which they could then navigate the darkness around them. The animation, undetectable to the viewer until they had fully entered the space, was projected on a much larger scale opposite the small screen. The immersive, almost disorienting effect of the small, pitch black room, coupled with the scale of the projected animation, succeeded in merging the shadow cast by the viewer’s body over the projected image. It thus became an inadvertent part of the work. It was my intention to position the viewer as somehow complicit in the mediation of the projected body, while concurrently calling into question their own Symbolic mediation.

In Dis/Integrate (2008), the placement and size discrepancies of screen and projection created a dialogue between each work that talk about notions of intimacy, or rather, extimacy (Myers 2003, pp. 41-45; Zizek, 2007b, p. 43). The small screen calls for close inspection, yet the monitor acts as a type of ‘barrier’ between viewer and image; the viewer may look at the work as one would a television image. The interaction between viewer and image is one-way, in so far as the viewer may experience the work in a voyeuristic sense. Yet they remain relatively disconnected from its content, which in itself could be read as a type of Big Brother/Symbolised surveillance, as the camera follows the filmic body endlessly around a darkened space. This experience, I propose, is linked to Kate Mondloch’s (2007) ‘double spatial dynamics’, in which the viewer is dislocated from the travails of the filmic body, yet nevertheless becomes embodied within the immersive space in which it hovers, ‘here but not here’.

However the large, projected animation, while monumental in size and therefore perhaps a denial of the intimate, can be ironically read as more intimate than the small screen. It demands of the viewer a greater level of physical interaction. The projected image, freed from the constraints of a monitor or screen, hovers as ephemera, as intangible and, I posit, as transient as the self. For me, it represents the absence of the body, while the animation references the presence of the body. As the animated image moves in and out of the darkness, and shifts between states of indistinct motion and moments of clarity in which the filmic body is revealed, this notion of absence and presence is highlighted. In this sense, the viewer is asked to immerse themselves in the space by considering their own body
in relation to the projected body, and thus to engage with the liminality of the work in relation to their own sense of self.

As meaning is dependent upon the context in which the work may be read, the opportunity to re-install previous work in a different site is an opportunity to reassess and reinterpret reflexive engagement in the research process. As such, the communicative possibilities of *Dis/Integrate* (2008) shifted considerably during a group show entitled *Ummm...The Articulate Practitioner* (2009), held at The Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery (MBCAG) in Fremantle, WA, in February of the following year. The installation of the work in a different site both demanded as well as allowed for the development of a new set of readings. The MBCAG is a heritage-listed building, resulting in some major installation limitations. The walls, floors and ceilings of the building had to remain untouched. My control of the space was compromised and I was required to find other solutions through which to create an immersive space. With its huge, vaulted ceilings, the single room I had access to was also considerably larger than the room I had used for the *Immerse* exhibition. The small, almost claustrophobic experience of the previous installation would not be possible on this site. Thus the room alone began to dictate a change in the work, and a change in the way in which I might achieve an experiential space that aimed to communicate the notion of the interior self as transient.

I decided to install the work in a similar configuration to the *Immerse* (2008) exhibition, positioning the animation on the wall opposite the real footage. Again, the viewer was directed to firstly view the real footage as they entered the space, having to turn around towards the door they had just walked through to view the projected animation on the wall opposite. However, both the size of the space, as well as the lack of a concealed monitor changed the dynamic of the work and the relationship between each video to alter the immersive quality of the work. The re-installation of the work in a different site allowed me to re-investigate the communicative aims of the piece and via a reflexive interrogation of the original, inform my critical decision-making process. As such, instead of using a flat, concealed screen to show the real footage, I used a small television monitor, similar to those used to monitor the real-time footage of surveillance cameras.

The monitor was placed on a non-descript utilitarian table, adding to the brutality of the footage-as-surveillance quality of the video. It was possible that the body on screen was being filmed as the viewer was looking at it, perhaps somewhere close by. This at once gave the real footage an immediacy and tension that was less apparent in its first incarnation. The real footage became a dominating
presence lacking in the original exhibition, positioning the viewer very much as a voyeur. However, the moments in the real footage in which a woman looks directly at the camera, her intention and feelings unclear, instantaneously implicated the viewer in their own voyeurism. Suddenly, the viewer became the viewed, as the woman in the footage looked directly at the camera, at ‘them’.

Indeed, it was possibly the real footage that subjugated the animation, made monumental in the huge space of the MBCAG, yet somehow even more intangible than in its previous guise at the *Immerse* (2008) show. Separated from the real footage by the sheer size of the room, the floating animation loomed over the space to the extent that viewers crowded to the side of the projection so as to avoid casting their own shadow on to the work. During *Immerse* (2008), the enclosed intimacy of the space did not allow the viewer enough room to make this choice—they were forced to engage their bodies with the animation. In this respect, I consider the MBCAG installation as less successful, as it became less immediately immersive or experiential. However, the reflexive analysis of this installation did result in a slight shift with regard to the nature of what I want to achieve in my creative work. I began to consider my creative work from a perspective less focused on its potential to manipulate the body of the viewer and more closely with the ideas inherent in notions of the interior self as transient. Specifically within concepts of the psychology of self, the fluctuation of the self between the blurred boundaries of what is and what isn’t, and the notion of the self as hovering somewhere in the middle of the Real and the Symbolic that construct it.

A reflexive analysis of the installation of *Dis/Integrate* at both the *Immerse* (2008) and MBCAG (2009) exhibitions resulted in a shift in perspective raised by questioning the mediating potential of creative work and how it can become an outlet by which to investigate the extent to which the interior self is in part constructed by the exterior, Symbolised self. In such a reading, that which comprises the self—or that which makes it ‘real’ or ‘not real’, ‘here’ but ‘not here’ becomes paramount. For me, the power of the real footage as it was installed at the MBCAG, in relation to its animated version, was in its investigation of these ideas. As I grew more confident in the medium of video as an interrogative tool the re-installation allowed me to renegotiate my creative focus more directly into investigating the themes of the mediated, constructed self as transient and ambiguous. I became less concerned with manipulating the body of the viewer in space, trusting that the immersive nature of the subject matter, and the ‘here but not here’ potential of video installation would create the experiential outcomes.
Experimenting with the viewer’s relationship to the screen became an important element of my creative research.

**Praxis: Redshift (2012)**

Outdoor carpark, North Perth
Perth Centre of Photography, Perth

In a collaborative work entitled *Redshift* (2012) (Figure 19), this viewer/screen relationship was investigated using a multi-channel digital projection on two opposing screens. Made in conjunction with Erin Coates and Sohan Ariel Hayes, *Redshift* (2012) was the result of the theoretical discussion and technological improvisation that took place during an intensive one-day workshop at CIA Studios, Perth, WA, in early January, 2012. The framework of the discussion comprised of the psychological inter-relationship between architecture, space and the subject in reference to projection-based artwork. Within this framework, ideas investigated included absence/presence and its simultaneous relationship to the projected image, the complex reality of being, and the physical reality of architectural spaces as transitory zones; transformation through destruction and/or decay; and the architectural surface as analogous to the surface of the human body. These explorations informed, to varying degrees, both the conceptual and physical imagery of the objects filmed, and the installation design of the works that became *Redshift* (2012).

![Figure 19: Redshift, photograph of installation [multi channel digital projection on two opposing screens], dimension variable, 2012. This image depicts the installation of Redshift in the outdoor carpark in North Perth, WA.](image-url)
In *Redshift* (2012), two projection screens faced each other, placing the viewer in the space between each screen. A set of objects undergoing gradual and ominous transformations were filmed falling towards the viewer on Screen 1 and disappearing away from the viewer on the opposing Screen 2. The image was then reversed, moving towards the viewer from Screen 2, and away from the viewer in Screen 1. The resulting image suggested a giant pendulum swinging backwards and forwards through the space, the objects appearing on one screen, disappearing for a moment in the space in between, and reappearing on the second screen. The intent being to activate the space between the screens via the ‘missing’ moment of the object’s midswing journey.

As such, the use of projection as a means of capturing and filling a space with an ‘absent’ object was juxtaposed with moments in which these absent objects ‘disappeared’, creating a suspended tension between the physical space that separated the screened images, and the viewer who waited for the absent ‘absent object’ to return. The investigation of absence and presence had an obvious connection to the lost Real of self that my own, solo practice explores. In this instance, the absent ‘absent object’ of projected imagery became a tool of activation in a physical, real-time space. It affected not only the architecture of the site in which it was installed, but the viewer who was positioned between the two screens and therefore at the epicentre of the moment of disappearance. In these crucial few seconds, the viewer ‘filled in the blanks’ and thereby, I would assert, became complicit in the ‘ominous transformations’ taking place. Thus, the complex reality of the absent object, in my view, became analogous to the complex reality of being. For my research in particular, it became analogous, specifically, to the notion of the self as both absent and present, as extimate, as transient.

The work comprised of three separate objects: amorphous clouds of smoke-like substance in various states of implosion; a dead cockatoo, seemingly flying towards and away from the viewer; and an oozing bag of indeterminate, fleshy material swinging in an increasingly bloody state of eventual depletion. The psychological implications of these ostensibly disparate objects referenced the beginning, middle and end of an unspecified life cycle, and the notion that transformation in the form of destruction, decay and eventual death is built in to every life. For my research, it is the hovering between these states of life/death transformation that most interest me conceptually, and that contributes to the placement of *Redshift* (2012) as relevant to my practice. The decision to film these swinging objects at 120 frames per second using a Genesis Red One camera
rendered the movement of the objects through space – and the transformations that occurred with each subsequent swing – with precision and clarity. The lucidity of the destruction, for me, intensified the uneasy dynamic of an imagery that is concomitantly beautiful and grotesque, hypnotic and violent.

The initial installation of Redshift (2012) was a one-night-only exhibition in the carpark of a tiling company on a major road in the North Perth, WA, shopping district (Figure 19). The site was selected for its proximity to the centre of the Perth Cultural Centre (and thus, easy accessibility for those who wanted to see it), and its two large, opposing walls. Hovering over first one, then the other wall and back again, the uncanniness of the at times disturbing images seemed to be amplified by the scale of the works. This was the first work I’ve been involved with that has included an audio element, and its uncanny effects were notable. A ghostly hum accompanied the clouds of amorphous smoke; the sound of a creaking rope with the fleshy, swinging bag; and finally, a bell tolling as the cockatoo made its reanimated death flight to and fro each screen. As an unlikely site of artwork, the carpark itself became an uncanny site; a familiar, everyday place rendered strange by the ghostly images lining its walls. For all its banality, the carpark as an outdoor setting, coupled with the scale of its walls that allowed for the projection of large-scale images, and the darkness of the evening in which they floated, gave the work a certain ghostly grandiosity.

When the work was transferred to a gallery setting, the size of the images were reduced. The small, rectangular-sized back room of the Perth Centre of Photography (PCP) offered two much smaller walls on which to project. Painted black, its windows and door blocked out by black fabric, the room became a site of near-claustrophobia. While the images in the carpark seemed untethered, floating within two huge walls, the images at PCP were restricted, framed within the confines of a greatly reduced space. The carpark installation, by necessity, placed the technology used to run it in the centre of the two screens, thus displacing the viewer from the midpoint of the images. At PCP, with a low ceiling at our disposal, the equipment was now removed from the centre of the space and lifted over the viewers’ head, suspended and unseen. To view the work, the viewer needed to enter the cupboard-like darkness of this tiny room and, as was the case in the viewing of Dis/Integrate (2008-2009), place themselves in the middle of the two screens. With the bass-heavy audio bouncing off the walls, and the dark tightness of the space suggesting a place of hidden things, the work in the PCP site, for me, offered the viewer an intense and compressed intimacy.
Praxis: *Domestic and Bridge* (from *Rooms I-V*) (2012)

Suspension (2012) James St Ampitheatre, Perth Cultural Centre

I had the opportunity to further investigate the relationship between intimacy and site, particularly with respect to screen size, as a part of an exhibition of video works entitled *Suspension* (2012) (Figure 20). Located in the James St Ampitheatre in the middle of the Perth Cultural Centre in Northbridge, WA, between the Alexander State Library and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, a massive LED screen provides the public with an ongoing series of screen-based works.\(^\text{10}\)

Watching any work of one’s own at such a scale for the first time, and in such a glaringly public venue is bound to be a little daunting. I experienced a sense of exposure viewing two of the works that are included in the *Rooms I-V* (2012) series, *Domestic* (2012) (Figure 15) and *Bridge* (2011) (Figure 21) run at that size on the opening night. While my reaction was a personal one, it became clear to me that this sense of being stripped bare was also relevant to the work itself, and made particularly evident via the venue and the screen size. The filmic body, as analogous to the self’s extimacy, is the (dis)embodiment of the intimate made external. In works aiming to explore the lost Real of self, a sense of the intimate exposed for – and within – the viewer therefore becomes paramount in highlighting their own uncanny extimacy.

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\(^\text{10}\) *Suspension* (2012) was screened twice a day for a month, at 1pm and 8pm. An electronic catalogue written by the exhibition’s curator Erin Coates, outlines the rest of the works and artists involved. It can be accessed at http://erincoates.net/video/suspension/
In *Domestic* (2012), the participant (who I shall refer to as Prita), is wandering through a domestic space, endlessly searching for something unknown to the viewer and perhaps to herself. She traverses the room, touching the walls around her, noticing the plants and the door frame. It is a personal space. An intimate space. As Prita’s image is captured by two separate mirrors within this space, my intention is that it becomes a metaphoric and literal reflection of private and inner searching.\(^{11}\) The viewer is positioned as the voyeur of her situation, as some kind of inadvertent spy. We observe Prita as she observes the room until suddenly, her gaze flickers upwards, towards us, right as us. Her direct gaze falls upon us, and we are at once implicated in our watching. We are, in a sense, caught out. We become the exposed. As Prita reaches a doorway, she turns the handle and looks, once more, at the viewer. This time, her gaze could be viewed as more knowing, perhaps suggesting that she is now aware of the viewer’s presence. In this, the viewer’s sense of exposure is perhaps underscored.

The power shift for the viewer in the ‘look back’ of the filmic subject can be linked to what Zizek (1992) describes as an ironic reversal of Jeremy Bentham’s ‘Panopticon’ effect. Using the film Alfred Hitchcock film *Rear Window* (1954) as an example, Zizek (p. 92) describes the Jimmy Stewart character as an all-powerful, all-seeing voyeur to the goings-on of his neighbours in the apartment opposite his own. The effect of the ‘Panopticon’ is in instilling within those being watched the sense that they may or may not be observed at any time, and that it is this uncertainty that increases the sense of menace. In *Rear Window* (1954), the reversal occurs when Stewart’s neighbours, far from showing any signs of discomfort or exploitation from his gaze, ignore it. Instead, it is Stewart who becomes anxious, terrified that he might miss out on some vital detail. While this effect is explored by Zizek between the characters within a film, I would suggest that, in Prita’s two ambiguous glances to camera in *Domestic* (2012), a similar, perhaps less menacing reversal may occur.

At the end of *Domestic* (2012), Prita slowly exists the screen, disappearing through a door. The viewer is left alone in the room. For a second or two we are left wondering where she has gone, what space she will occupy next, and if we will be allowed to follow. *Bridge* (2011) begins, answering our question. Running the length of a bridge, surrounded by a tunnel of white, Prita runs away, perhaps from the eyes

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\(^{11}\) In Freudian terms, the notion of the ‘double’ as viewed in reflections, mirrors and shadows is, in childhood, an ego-driven, narcissistic desire for immortality that then inverts in adulthood: “The ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud, 1919, p. 234). As Prita wanders through her series of rooms in *Rooms I-V* (2012), and particularly in *Domestic* (2012) where her reflection is visible in two separate surfaces, the spaces in which she hovers between real and not real, between absence and presence and between life and death is uncannily apparent.
that are watching her and into something else – something unknown. Something that we, as viewers, are not invited to access. Once again privacy, and the issue of intimacy becomes a part of the experience of watching the work, this time because of our exclusion from it. As Prita nears the end of the bridge, and as the white tunnel closes around her, the viewer’s anticipation of her inevitable engulfment is, however, left unsatisfied. As close as the now-tiny figure of Prita is to her eventual fate, she does not disappear. She remains running, close to, but never reaching the end. My intention is to leave the viewer wondering, perhaps, if she ever will. And once again, in the shock of her journey cut short, the viewers’ voyeuristic engagement is revealed, this time by their own expectations.

Unlike every other short video work I have made, the works shown in Suspension were not discrete and looped single versions of themselves. Instead, the works were shown one after the other, as part of a larger loop that included works by other artists, with a total running time of approximately 40 minutes. As short works amounting to less than two and a half minutes back to back, the sense of glimpsing something that perhaps we should not have been privy to, is enhanced by the length of time it takes to see them again. Even assuming a viewer would keep watching for another forty minutes before they were repeated, the brevity of the videos perhaps leaves little room for narrative connection to be made, especially considering that ambiguity was an intention of the works. Coupled with the intimacy of the scenes, and Prita’s ‘look back’, Domestic (2012) and Bridge (2011) may leave the viewer wondering what it was they had actually seen, and with a lingering sense that they shouldn’t have seen it. Stripped of sound, the silence of the videos, highlighted by the audio that accompanied the works of other artists that bookended them, gave the animations a heightened sense of unease and of intimacy laid bare. The intimacy of the works shown on a monumental screen, and in a very public amphitheatre in the middle of the city, rendered the viewers’ private engagement as a kind of public exposure. In this sense, there was the potential to turn the intimacy of the viewing experience around on itself. In revealing the viewer to themselves as a viewer, the ‘gaze of the screen’ (Dixon, 1995, p. 2), in conjunction with the intimacy of the works, not only implicated the viewer in their looking, but, I would propose, exposed the ‘blank spot’ of the impossible Real within (Belsey, 2005, p. 49).

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12 Each animated video work that comprises the Rooms I-V (2012) series is less than two minutes long. The intention of the series is that each work (such as Bridge (2011) or Domestic (2012)) may be a stand-alone piece but that together, make up a series of interlocking vignettes, played separately and simultaneously. See Section 5 for further discussion.
*Bridge (Rooms II)* can be viewed by clicking the link below.

[Bridge (Rooms II) video](#)

Figure 21:  Bridge, video stills from Rooms I-V (Bridge), dimensions variable, 2012.
The experiential possibilities for the viewer to the animated works have the potential to, as I’ve discussed, move or morph when viewed at a different site, using different technology. I had the opportunity to show Bridge (2011), (along with the Clouds (2009), discussed earlier) in two other spaces. In Breathing Space (Figure 22), a works-in-progress space situated in the transient zone of the Edith Cowan University library foyer in Mt Lawley, Perth, I installed Bridge (2011) on a monitor and placed it on a table. Another monitor sat alongside it, which showed Clouds (2009). Once again, the very public nature of the space, and one unused to integrating creative visual work into its everyday function, gave a sense of intimacy exposed for the viewer. The monitors, although small in this case and therefore the antithesis of the huge LED screen of the Suspension (2012) exhibition, were nevertheless eye-catching to a library visitor, simply because they were not ‘meant’ to be there. As a site designed to pass through, rather than sit and spend time in, the installed works offered themselves as a point of minor architectural subversion, an excuse for the viewer to stop, to observe. The small scale of the videos may have acted as a further incitement for the viewer, as they were required to move close to the monitors to properly see the works.

The renegotiation of the space to one of contemplation was also reflected in my decision to, for the first time, include the tangible drawings from one of my animations. Using the L-shaped wall space at my disposal in Breathing Space, I hung a line of approximately one hundred drawings that made up a section of Bridge (2011). Each drawing, pinned in a linear row, represented one twenty fifth of a second of movement. The result was an almost microscopic investigation of Prita’s journey along the bridge, a literal, highly specific and necessarily intimate breakdown of the tiniest of her movements. The drawings invited the viewer to take part in this exploration. Yet like the experience of the viewer as accidental voyeur (as discussed when the video works were shown at Suspension (2012)), this was a double-edged invitation. Removed from the ephemera of the moving animation, the drawings became a source of unasked-for power for the viewer, giving them the opportunity to engage with whatever image they wished to, and move on from those they did not. They were able to touch the paper on which Prita was drawn, to linger over particular images, and break the linear line of movement at will. Privy to the stripped-back, unadorned nature of the working drawings, the viewer also became
intimate with the process of making. The jittery, mirage-like world of the animations were, like Prita's journey, deconstructed, and laid bare. The uneasy dialectical exchange of vulnerability and intimacy positioned the viewer as unwitting Symbolic masters of an experiential space investigating the Real that is lost to it.

In exhibiting the drawings alongside its video counterpart, the installation at *Breathing Space* was also asking the viewer to compare two works that are inseparable from the other. Fastened at the top of each page along a wall, the drawings were vulnerable to the drafts drifting in through the opening and closing of the sliding doors in the library foyer. The capacity of real-time, everyday breezes to shift and flutter the drawings imbued in them a sense of delicacy and fragility, breathing its own life into the static works, feeding the intimacy of the images. When viewed in tandem with the video work, it was perhaps the real world's capacity to affect the works that married the drawings to the here-and-now, as opposed to the here-but-not-here world of the screen. The drawings, spread out along the walls of the space like a deconstructed flip book, 'come to life' in the *Bridge* (2011) video – or perhaps, come to another kind of life. Removed from the microscopic observation afforded the viewer by the drawings, they are instead drawn into the otherworldly story of the animation. Prita, appearing in the foreground of the shimmering bridge, becomes a *Ruckenfigur*, drawing the viewer down its length and into the tunnel of swirling white light that fails to swallow her, that fails to swallow us. Denied the Real of disappearance, of nothingness, we repeat the journey again and again with Prita in every loop of the video.

![Figure 22: Bridge, photograph of drawings from Breathing Space installation, 2001.](image)
The installation of *Bridge* (2011) along with a section of its working drawings gave rise to some interesting possibilities for future work. The construction of my animations occurs in the deconstruction of the original video: From filming the video, to printing each frame, to drawing over each print-out, to scanning each print-out back into an editing application, to creating a reconstructed, animated version of the original. In exhibiting the animation alongside the drawings, yet another process occurs: a deconstruction of the video reconstruction. As I noted in *Breathing Space*, the drawings, while indelibly linked to the video, became their own work within the physical gallery space. Rather than marking a point in the making of the video animations, the drawings developed new life. In terms of the Symbolised self, these processes of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction have an analogous relationship. It was my intention to suggest that, in the relationship between the physical tangibility of the drawings to the immediate environment in which they are installed and how that relationship sits alongside the ephemera of their animated counterpart, the lost Real of the interior, transient self may be sensed.
SECTION 5
GRADUATION EXHIBITION: TRANSIENCE (2012)

A walk through Transience
A short walk-through the exhibition is available to via the following link.
Transcience walk through video

Rooms I-V, Clouds, Portraits

Every exhibition I have been involved with over the last three and a half years of my doctoral candidature has informed my creative praxis, influencing the decisions I have made around materials, processes and installation. New ways in which to create experiential spaces in which the viewer might be immersed have been generated, both in the sensory and conceptual aims of my research. As such, Kate Mondloch’s (2007, p. 24) model of double spatial dynamics and its positioning of the viewer as ‘here but not here’ in the gallery space has supported my exploration of immersivity for the viewer of my video installation work, and created an analogous link to the notion of the self as transient. Hovering between the co-existing states of the Symbolic and the Real that is lost to it, as estimate (Evans, 1996, n.p.), as both absent and present (Myers, 2003, p. 23), it is the sense of the interior self as ambiguous that I aim to create for – and within – the viewer. It is the reflexive aspect of the research that has allowed me to synthesise these ideas in a critical praxis. As such, the following Section details the installation of Transience, the solo exhibition that marked the culmination of the creative element of my candidature. Each of the works are critically and reflexively related to previous incarnations, and the critical decisions I made to communicate as closely as possible the central premise of my research: the interior self as transient, and the Real that is lost to it.

Transience was exhibited in September, 2012, at Spectrum Project Space, Mt Lawley, Perth, WA.

Spectrum is an L-shaped space. It has at its disposal, two large, moveable walls that can be shifted around the room, creating the suggestion of smaller spaces within the whole. Leaving the front space (the long part of the ‘L’) open (section A), I used one portable wall to section off the back of this area, (section C) and another to separate the last section of space (the short part of the ‘L’), (section B). Three discrete spaces were created to house the three works that comprised the exhibition: Rooms I-V (section A); Clouds (section B); Portraits (section C).
Figure 23: Rooms I-V, photograph of Rooms I-V in Transience, dimensions 180cm x 180cm, 2012.
*Hallway (Rooms III), Stairs I (Rooms IV), Stairs 2 (Rooms V)* can be viewed by clicking each link below.

- Hallway (Rooms III) video
- Stairs I (Rooms IV) video
- Stairs II (Rooms V) video

Figure 24:  Hallway, Stairs I, Stairs II, video stills of Rooms I-V, dimensions variable, 2012.
In section A, I projected the five animated videos of *Rooms I-V* (Figure 23) on individual, suspended or ‘floating’ screens made of fabric. Unlike the design of *Redshift* (2012) at the Perth Centre of Photography, in which the viewer was encouraged to place themselves between two opposing screens and ‘fill in the blanks’ between each image, the screens in *Transience* were positioned around the space to encourage the viewer to drift around and among them. The intention was to break the notion of linear time so as to imply a shift from the everyday, or the Symbolically constructed world. Instead, the installation aimed to suggest the interior space of the mind, or perhaps more specifically, the mind of the filmic subject. In filling the space with co-existing images of the same person, intimating a series of endless searches, the viewer was positioned to physically drift through Prita’s figurative mind. In doing so, the viewers were, in a sense, mimicking Prita’s journey through her series of ‘rooms’, and for me, themselves an allegory to the ‘rooms’ of the interior self.

The fabric of the screens enabled the projected images to be seen from either side, immersing the viewer within Prita’s world, surrounding them from wherever they stood in the space. Each projection became a mirror image of itself, reflecting the state of contradiction co-existing that, I affirm, supports the notion of the self as transient via the lost Real. The suspended fabric, secured by lengths of hidden dowel hanging from the ceiling by trace, was unframed by any other device. As was the case with the drawings hung in *Breathing Space* (2011), the rest of the fabric was subject to the slight environmental disturbances that their proximity to the front door of the gallery and the viewers who walked around them allowed. In passing the screens, the viewer therefore became imbued in the work in the here-and-now, as the breeze they generated rippled gently through the projected images. The aim was to create an immersive space that replicated for the viewer the notion of the self as concomitantly two things at once – in this case, both absorbed in the ‘rooms’ of the projected work, and yet also present in the gallery. As if, as Roland Barthes described in relation to his experience in a cinema theatre, “I had two bodies at the same time” (cited in Mondloch, 2010, p. 19). In this idea, I would suggest, we find the interior self as transient, as co-existing states of contradiction.

Not all of the screens were completely visible from every vantage point, revealing only a glimpse here, or a suggestion there, the aim being to prompt the
viewer’s curiosity to continue through the space, and to give the works a sense of hidden things revealed. Underscoring the sense of privacy stripped bare was the grainy aesthetic of the animations. Evoking old Super 8 home movies, their scratchy quality retained a sense of the archival, as if the viewer had stumbled into a figurative box of somebody’s old home movies; as is the viewer was watching a diary sprung to ephemeral life. In this, there was the suggestion of the intimate, interior self made external, or extimacy (Zizek, 2007b, p. 43; Myers, 2003, p. 41). For the filmic subject of the projections, whose circular searching is analogous to the search for the Real that is lost to it; and to the viewer, whose ‘here-but-not-here’ (Mondloch, 2007, p. 33) position within the floating works rendered the sense of interior transience that the works explore.

The pastel colours used in the animations could be read as tying the works further to the notion of memory, their fairytale hues imprinting in the works, like the hand-coloured ‘happy little Vegemites’ (‘Happy Little Vegemites’, n.d.; NylonStudios, 2010) before it, a kind of contemporarised nostalgia. Memory and nostalgia steep the works in a sense of half-forgotten, perhaps undetermined longing that for me, creates an allegorical link to the indescribable, repressed longing for Symbolic suicide (Zizek, 2005, p. 33). A desire to fall, to escape, to go back to the nothingness from where we started and that continues to define us, before language painted us ‘real’ (or rather, ‘Symbolic’). This analogy is discussed in more detail in relation to the Bridge (2011) animation, below.

One colour that emerged as notable for me in three of the five vignettes was the sky blue of Prita’s shirt (Domestic, Stairwell 1, Stairwell 2 (all 2012)) (Figure 28). The colour and the choice to use it on a prominent piece of Prita’s clothing was an intuitive one, and was influenced by the colours often used in 1950’s hand-coloured photographs. Its significance did not reveal itself to me until I had completed the installation of Transience (2012). Once installed, I was finally able to see each part of the series together, projected simultaneously. Due to the placement of the screens, the sky blue shirt was visible at various points and in more than one video at a time. The colour acted as a common thread, tying the isolated vignettes together. The blue of Prita’s shirt replicated the blue of Dorothy’s dress in The Wizard of Oz (1939), a blue that is also associated with the dress of another great female literary figure of childhood, Alice, of Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865) fame. As another unwitting adventurer negotiating a familiar yet strange world, Alice might be Dorothy’s English cousin.
It was interesting to me to note that the dress colour of these two iconic female adventurers, lost in a real-but-not-real world, with themselves real-but-not real within them, found their way on to Prita’s tank top. However, unlike Alice or Dorothy, in Prita’s disjointed journey, which is split over five different screens, and literally suspended and without end as she is looped over and over again, there is no way out of her rabbit hole and no ruby slippers to take her wherever it is she is looking to go. Like Anna Gaskell’s floating girl in Untitled (half life) (2002), Prita is ‘caught’ in an unspecified narrative she can’t escape. The intention being that, as the viewer, we are similarly trapped. The looped repetition of the works have a correlative relationship to the psychoanalytic notion of repetition as a means to repress (to hide) that which we cannot face: “The compulsion to repeat is a manifestation of the power of the repressed’ (Freud, 1920:14), illustrating the strength of the influence of the repressed and the unconscious” (Kaye, 2008, n.p.). In repetition, there is the unconscious attempting to give voice to that which is repressed. As the uncanny may be located in those images or objects that trigger repressed feelings, sensations or memories, the repetitious nature of looped video art may become both a representation and a trigger for the uncanny in the viewer.

In each vignette that comprises Rooms I-V (2012), there is the notion of running towards nothingness. Prita exits each space and into something that is not revealed to the viewer: a space behind a door we cannot access (Domestic), a room engulfed in blackness (Hallway), a stairway leading to a place we cannot follow (Stairs I) and, in particular, another stairway leading upwards to brilliant whiteness (Stairs II). The elusive lost Real, the void of nothing that determines Prita’s endless search is closest to touching in Bridge (2011). Running down the length of a shimmering bridge whose exterior details are bleached out and uncertain, Prita is encircled by clouds of white. As she nears the end of the bridge, the whiteness becomes increasingly encompassing and we, as viewers, anticipate Prita’s final engulfment. It is the promise of the Act (Myers, 2003, pp. 59-60), the final eradication of the Symbolic; a death (drive) leading to some place else, perhaps to a Symbolic world radically redefined. It is the vortex of the uncanny breathing sun of Clouds (2009), of the interior self effaced into nothingness. She never gets there. Snapped back at the moment before she disappears completely, Prita’s journey down the endless bridge begins again. As in Clouds (2009), we are left to contemplate a Real that is lost to us, that exists yet does not, as a void that is both inside and outside of us and that is married to the Symbolic part of us that determines who and how we are.
Clouds
Looped video (animation), 2009. Projected

Clouds (2009) (Figure 25) was projected large on the wall of section B. Obscured from the viewer’s initial contemplation of Rooms I-V (2012) via its position around the corner in the ‘short’ part of the L-shaped gallery space, and by the large portable wall positioned in front of it, it was, nevertheless, visible towards the end of section A. Indeed, the heavy, breathing sun of Clouds (2009) came into peripheral view at the moment in which the viewer circled the floating Bridge (2011) projection. By extension, Bridge (2011) became a precursor to the Clouds (2009) work, in which the white tunnel through which Prita endlessly runs, becomes the uncanny sun.

The scale of the projection and the omission of other works around it, gave Clouds (2009) a privileged position in Transience, and linked it to the notion of intimacy analysed with regard to the animated works shown on the huge LED screen in Suspension (2012), and suggested by Rothko in relation to the size of his paintings: “I make large pictures…because I want to create a state of intimacy” (May, 1998, n.p.). In this state of intimacy we have an experience of immersion in the creative work, and as viewers outside the work, we have a concomitant experience of extimacy (Zizek, 2007b, p. 43; Myers, 2003, p. 41). As discussed earlier in relation to this work, the viewer is placed both outside the work in the gallery setting, and inside the work via the Ruckenfigur (Koerner, 1985, p. 152) of the telegraph pole. The sun, void-like and uncanny, represents the lost Real of the interior self, breathing as a body does, yet separate, hovering in the sky, removed from the earth, removed from the self. The expansion and contraction of the sun was so slow that for some viewers, it was undetectable. As such, several viewers initially mistook the work for a still image. Yet for others, Clouds (2009) became a space of unsettling reverie, its unearthly breathing sun made all the more hypnotic by the barely-there pace at which it moved.

13 These observations have been made on the basis of viewer feedback during the course of the exhibition.
The intention of the installation of *Clouds* was to once again suggest the notion of the interior self as transient; as hovering on the border of the Symbolic (the telegraph pole) and the Real that is lost to it (the breathing sun). As outlined above, the extimacy imbued in the work for the viewer was arguably created by the scale of the projection, the images within it and, as with the other works that comprised the *Transience* exhibition, the lack of audio. In making a work designed to unsettle, there was, for some viewers, a simultaneous level of relaxation and peace to be found in the silence as they contemplated *Clouds*. Given the conscious decision I had made to time the ‘breaths’ of the sun to that of the body in deep meditation, this result was not completely surprising. Nor was it unwelcome. To generate both a sense of peace in conjunction with a sense of unease in the viewer is, for me, an apt outcome for work that investigates the interior self as a co-existing state of contradiction.

In this way, the very the silence of the works that comprised *Transience* became a source of immersion for the viewer. One viewer, who brought a class of film students in to see the exhibition, noticed what she described as a ‘change of frequency’ in the group, as they responded to the quiet in which they were suddenly engulfed. While this may have been a reaction to the dichotomy of the social, exterior world meeting the interior gallery space, for me, it was a valuable
observation in terms of experientiality. In _Transience_, the viewer’s every movement or utterance was amplified in a space whose silence invoked the rarified air of a library, and in whose anxious, scratchy works, the undercurrent of a whisper, sharing some vaguely dark secret. It is this notion of the interior self as the keeper of dark secrets that infers the psychological repression that separates the self from confronting the Real as lost to it. In repression we find the gaze as filling in the ‘blank spot’ of the Real with desire (the objet a), (McGowan, 2007, p. 11). And it is from a position of repression that we are able to experience a sense of the uncanny (Freud, 1919, p. 244), as our indefinable repressions are reflected back to us. Given this, I would suggest that it is, in part, the silence of the works in _Transience_, and the ‘dark secrets’ it may infer, that the notion of the interior self and its link to the Real that is lost to it might be suggested.

**Portraits**

Stella, Colleen, Steve, Pat, Justin, Erin


The notion of the uncanny and the issue of intimacy (and subsequently, extimacy) that was the intention of _Clouds_ (2009) and _Rooms I-V_ (2012) was also the present in the making of the series of video portraits that comprised _Portraits_ (2012) (Figure 26). Installed in section C of the space, I was aware that we, as viewers, are conscious of the fact that the filmed participants cannot see us and that a lag in time has occurred between the moment in which they were filmed and our viewing of the result. However, the work aimed to instill a sense of unease, regardless of this knowledge. The relationship between the participants of the video portraits and the viewer was designed to incite disquiet, a level of confrontation, and an almost unbearable intimacy. In accordance with this dichotomy of intimacy/confrontation, I aimed to position _Portraits_ (2012) within the notion of the power/impotence of the gaze (Zizek, 1992, p. 72), and explore the link between the gaze to the Real for the viewer (McGowan, 2007, p. 11); a link that I intended to expose via the unease the work aimed to create.

Certainly in the editing process, I found myself feeling most uncomfortable. I had made the decision to not play back any of the recorded portraits until the completion of the total filming, waiting until I was alone with the videos at my computer. It was not until I started to watch the results that I realised how intimate the works actually were, certainly for me. How often do we silently stare front-on into the gazing faces of even our most trusted intimates, for up to ten minutes at a
time? Faced with ‘look back’ (Dixon, 1995, p. 2) of the participants, I found myself hurrying the editing process to reduce the amount of time I spent with them. In engaging with the portraits, it was as if I were encroaching on the privacy of the participants’, all of whom were people I knew to varying degrees as fellow students and friends. I felt not unlike a voyeur looking through a peephole, or a sneaky sister reading her sibling’s diary. Yet unlike those situations, in which the obscenity of the act is in its one-way secrecy, every person who sat for the Portrait series knew they were being watched – or rather, knew that they soon would be watched. Likewise, while a peephole may offer a view of unguarded movement and action, and a diary the potentially unabridged version of a person’s thoughts and feelings, the participants of Portraits were, by virtue of their complicity in the filming process, necessarily guarded.

![Figure 26: Portraits, photograph of Portraits in Transience, 2012.](image)

This knowledge set the participants’ of the Portraits series in direct opposition to Robbie Cooper’s Immersion (2008 – present) series, yet I would argue that the result for the viewer was similar. In Immersion, the technology used to film the participants was hidden, and the participants were given television, films, video games et al to become absorbed by during the recording process. This arguably allowed the viewer of the series a level of Symbolic mastery (Zizek, 1992, p. 72) as they observed the participants’ reactions. I would maintain that the series is a potent investigation of the influence of electronic media to efface the viewer (or to reduce them to Symbolic automata). And that positioning the viewer to watch this effacement is a powerful way in which to reflect this notion back on the similarly
immersed observer, and thus counteract the mastery of their gaze. I would suggest that a similar level of participant/viewer reflection can be traced in the *Portraits* series, as the unease detectable in the participants’ faces in response to the recording process potentially becomes the discomfort of the viewer as they watch them. The difference between the works, I would propose, is in the role of the participant. In Cooper’s work, as its title suggests, it is immersion itself that is being revealed. In *Portraits* it is, perhaps, the negation of immersion and what that reveals that is being explored. In the faces of the participants of *Portraits*, there was reflected the discomfort of the filming process, and the knowledge that they were being filmed to be watched. For the viewer, the discomfort was in the participants’ ‘look back’ and, as with the viewer of Cooper’s *Immersion* (2008 – present) series, the subsequent initiation of the ‘couple power/impotence’ (Zizek, 1992, p. 72) of their own gaze.

Initially, it is likely that it was the circumstance of the recording process that engendered a sense of unease in the participants. Left alone in a large, university-based studio empty of people (including myself), music or any other immediate distraction, the participants’ were asked to sit as still as possible for up to 10 minutes, looking nowhere but into the lens of the video recorder. The recording process engineered during the shooting of the portraits was a stripping of the distraction that comprises everyday life – the distraction that ultimately serves to create a veil to obscure the terrifying absence/presence of the Real. The isolation of the participants, and their instructions to refrain from moving trapped them in a space in which the veil began to slip, rendering a sense of the Real a little more tangible. I had inadvertently created a situation that was perhaps destabilising enough to if not invite the cut of the Real (Myers, 2003, p. 28), than to shake the participants’ from the somnambulant lull of their Symbolic reality. The video camera, into which the participants were instructed to direct their gaze, marked the suggestion of this slippage and, in the end result, the remorseless evidence of the participants’ response to it. Every eye flicker, every tiny gesture of unease or nervousness or even boredom, became scrutinized under the returned gaze of the camera lens. In this way, the participants’ experience became a negotiation of their own, naked isolation in the face of the impossible Real, and the technology used to both mediate and capture it. Pinned by the relentless and microscopic gaze of the video camera lens, the discomfort detectable in the participants’ faces became evidence of a kind of forensic examination via technology – a living, psychological autopsy.
The installation of *Portraits* (2012) in *Transience* (2012) aimed to reflect this quality for the viewer. In an exhibition entitled *Out of the Shadows* (2011) at Grey Door gallery space, I placed two, 48 inch monitors on black-clad stands, through which I ran the animations, *Bridge* (2011) and *Clouds* (2009). In the darkened gallery, the screens appeared as suspended orbs; glowing eyes peering out towards the viewer. This exhibition, in which the gaze of the filmic body is doubled by the gaze of the screens themselves, influenced my decision to install the *Portraits* (2012) series in a block of wall-mounted monitors for *Transience* (2012). The effect was retained in the six screens, yet offered a quality that was perhaps missing in the *Grey Door* (2011) exhibition. By replacing *Bridge* (2011) and *Clouds* (2009) with variously animated and ‘real’ portraits, the faces became entombed within the near-clinical starkness of the black monitor frames. For me, the faces in *Portraits* (2012) took on the patina of the embalmed. The shadow of the ‘deathly trace’ discussed in relation to the recordings of Mike Parr’s performance work (Coulter-Smith & Magon, 1988, p. 22), in which the recorded body is inhibited of ‘self presence’ when viewed as a video, and analogous of the lost Real of the psyche, can thus be linked to the *Portrait* (2012) series, and is why they subsequently capture, I suggest, a sense of the “the uncanny menace of the real” (Kay, 2003, p. 57) that is imbued in the notion of the interior self as transient. As Mondloch (2007, p. 33) suggests in her model of double spatial dynamics, in which the viewer of video art is positioned as ‘neither here nor there’ in the gallery space, I would suggest that video or film are mediums in which this fluctuating state has the potential to be revealed within the content of the works themselves. Indeed, film theorist Siegfried Kracauer wrote, as far back as 1940 that, “film...is interested in the refuse, in what is just there – both in and outside the human being. The face counts for nothing in film unless it includes the death’s-head beneath” (1997, p. vii).

For me, the ‘death’s head beneath’ (Kracauer, 1997, p. viii) is the lost Real of the interior self, positioning the self as indelibly transient as it hovers in co-existing contradictory states of absence and presence, both familiar and strange, intimate and the external. In the installation of *Transience*, I found that the lost Real of self hovered like a spectre over the exhibition, imbuing in the works an uneasy sense of (Symbolic) death. Or, I would propose, more specifically and more appropriately within the notion of the interior self, a sense of death as existing in tandem with life.
Summation

*Transience* offered itself as a site in which I was able to view all of the works I had selected to represent my candidature and the aims of my creative praxis in one space. Demarcating each area of the gallery into distinct spaces enabled me to separate the works, the aim being to replicate for the viewer the different psychological ‘rooms’ through which they might linger and that were alluded to in the *Rooms I-V* series of ‘floating’ projections. The open-sided portable walls that allowed for the demarcation was intended to create a concurrent ‘flow-on’ effect for the viewer and for the works themselves, which could be variously glimpsed from different points of the gallery space. An unexpected upshot of this layout was its usefulness in determining links between the works, some of which had not been fully exploited or reviewed before the installation.

*Rooms I-V* is a case in point. Moving from the monochrome palette evident in works made earlier in my candidature, such as *Dis/Integrate* (2008-2009) and
Clouds (2009), I introduced colour to my animations to create a kind of moving tinted photograph. In such photographs, the self as painted over becomes both symbolised (or mediated), by the choices of the artist, yet simultaneously cast free of the net of the same. In rendering the self as something that it is not – or as a version of itself that is still recognisable – I recalled the comments of Patrick Fuery regarding the capacity of film to “make the body more intimate, and yet at the same time…render the body as something alien and strange to behold” (2000, p. 72). In as much as hand-tinted photographs have, for me, the same capacity to defamiliarise the recognisable self, Fuery’s view supported my decision to develop a reinterpretation of such images as moving animations. With its link to extimacy (or the intimate made external) and the uncanny (in which Dolar places the extimate of self (cited in Cole, 2006, p. 393)), Fuery’s discussion of the body on film placed the animations directly within the central tenets of my research of the transient, interior self. However, it was not until the ‘moving tinted photographs’ that comprised Rooms I-V were installed in Transience that another layer of the works were revealed as similarly supportive of these aims. I had consciously used the colour blue to render Prita’s tank top, yet it was only when the works were hung as separate, ‘floating’ projections, that I could see the impact this colour had in connecting her series of endless searches for the viewer. Or in positioning Prita as a latter-day Alice or Dorothy, connecting her to a tradition of girls lost in a strange world and themselves strange in it, and its analogous link to the lost Real of the interior self as similarly uncanny. And within the notions of extimacy and the uncanny located in the body in film, similarly transient.

Figure 28: Rooms I-V, photograph of Rooms I-V in Transience, 2012.
The animation method I employed in Rooms I-V and in several of the Portraits works aimed to reflect this transience, placing the filmic body as floating over itself as the animated version of the self was drawn over its ‘real’ counterpart. Developed in the Dis/Integrate work, the animated self was originally projected opposite a video of its ‘real’ counterpart. As my reflexive investigation of the work in relation to Zizek’s notion of the self as at the interstice of the Real and the Symbolic (Myers, 2003, pp. 28-29), and the subsequent transience this imbues in the interior self continued, the creative outcomes reflected this theoretical progression. As such, in works that were included in the Portraits series, such as Stella and Steve, which were initially exhibited in BYOB (2011), the self as opposing states co-existing (Zizek, 1987, n.p.), is explored as the ‘real’ and animated versions of the self are variously revealed and obscured, then revealed again within the same work.

Monster (2012) provided the opportunity to develop this notion further, resulting in Erin, in which the moments of disappearance and reappearance of the ‘real’ and the animated are rent asunder, positioning the animated self as at war with the ‘real’. In this work, I would suggest that the ‘real’ is the self’s Symbolic identity, the face that is informed by the exterior that defines it. The animated version becomes, if not the Real of the self, then the self’s awareness of its loss. Struggling from the bonds of psychological repression represented by the ‘real’, the animated self, imbued with the ‘deathly trace’ (Coulter-Simth & Magon, 1988, p. 22) of the presence/absence of the lost Real becomes, I would suggest, more real than the real. That is, the animation reflects the peeling away of the Symbolic veil that separates the self from the void of the Real (Belsey, 2005, pp. 48-49) via the removal of psychological repression and the self’s subsequent awareness of its loss. Originally explored creatively inUntitled (2011) in relation to the objet a and the gaze, this notion of awareness as a tool in which to highlight the self’s enablement of the net of the Symbolic has, for me, an analogous link to creative praxis, wherein the potential for narcissism in art making may be avoided by the reflexive awareness of that which lies outside of it (Crouch, 2007, p. 113). In the public exhibition of the works discussed, it was my aim within the reflexive praxis model to instigate this process of awareness in myself as the researcher and, while making no assumptions about how the work might be read, offer an experiential site in which it might be suggested in the viewer.

Another connection between works and the conceptual aims of the research that was only made transparent in the installation of Transience was the ‘echo’ of the white, void-like ‘tunnel of the Real’ present in both Clouds and the Bridge.
animation from the *Rooms I-V* series (Figure 29). While I had shown these works side by side in both the *Grey Door* and the *Breathing Space* exhibitions, is was their position in relation to one another in *Transience* that, for me, created the more powerful relationship with reference to the lost Real of the interior self. Shown in the previous exhibitions via monitors, I would suggest that it was *Transience*’s projected counterpart that strengthened their link. Released from the frame of the monitor, the ‘floating’ projected *Bridge* became an analogous conduit to describe the ephemeral, intangible interior self, and in its image of the white tunnel of light, the equally ungraspable void of the Real within. In *Clouds*, the scale of the image, projected large on a wall, aimed to, as in *Suspension* (2012) and *Dis/Integrate* (2008-2009), offer itself as a place of immersion and intimacy (and extimacy) for the viewer. This work was always intended to be shown at a large scale with the idea of recreating for the viewer the representation of the sky as all encompassing. However, it was in *Transience*, and *Bridge*’s position as a geographical precursor to *Clouds* that the conceptual concerns of the work became even clearer. Projected large, the work’s capacity to immerse the viewer to the point where they might become equally disturbed and soothed, positioned *Clouds*, for me, as the axis point on which the rest of the works turned. Denoting the lost Real in its imagery of the uncanny, void-like sun, disconnected from the earth (from the self) and, in its ‘breathing’, the suggestion of the Real as a concurrent part of the interior self, I would assert that the work set the scene that determined the interior self as concomitantly two opposing states. As such the work intended to propose the self as both exterior and interior (read: extimacy); both Symbolic and Real (read: the self at the interstice between which the self is rendered transient); and the viewer as both disturbed (uncanny) and soothed (immersed as Symbolic automata). With this in mind, I would assert that it is the immersivity of the installation in the gallery space, informed by its exhibition in various sites that aided in creating the potential for an experience of transience in the viewer.
Figure 29: Clouds, photograph of Clouds in Transience, 2012.
In the reflexive analyses of the works I have exhibited to date, culminating in the Transience exhibition, I have noted that several themes have made repeated appearances. The notion of intimacy revealed and its link for the interior self as extimacy; death or the suggestion of disappearance denied; that which could be perceived to be uncanny, including the gaze returned; and finally a sense solitary loneliness that seems to permeate almost all of the works and for me, serves as the one, overarching theme that links every work together. It has been the continual visual resurgence of these ideas that have determined my theoretical research and in turn continues to inform my creative practice and the development of my praxis.

The sense of intimacy along with the solitary nature of my creative works is, for me, always steeped in the psychological. It is my opinion that no one can truly ‘get inside our head’ other than ourselves and even then there exists the possibility of endless miles of unchartered terrain (or, as in Rooms I-V, rooms and corridors and stairs and doors) of which we have limited to no access. In this way, we are all solitary creatures, and we are all alone. Yet we are simultaneously social animals who live in the world and communicate with others. It was from this position of co-existing duality, of the self as a transient state (or inside and outside; intimate and external et al) that I located a definition of the interior self as transient through Zizek’s reading of Lacan’s notion of the Real, in which contradiction co-exists, or in which “each is already in itself its own opposite” (Zizek, 1987, n.p.). In this definition, I was able to both corral the ambiguous notions of self that I was grappling with, and tease out and define the ideas that kept appearing in my work.

The interior self is a personal, intimate space. I would suggest that its relationship to the Real, and the Real’s relationship to the Symbolic, confuses this intimacy: the interior self becomes split by the Symbolic, and thereby becomes simultaneously external (or, extimate). In language, in entering the ‘real’ world, this process of externalisation/internalisation determines the Real as lost the interior self. And yet the Real still exists as a shadow, as a gap in the interior self (Belsey, 2005, p. 14). Terrifying in its void-like nothingness, the lost Real is concealed from the self by the self, and that nevertheless continues to be sensed, as both horrifying or enticing (or, in keeping with Zizek’s definition, both at the same time). I would offer that, in my own works, there is an attempt to tug away a little at the veil that separates the interior self from the Real that is lost to it. Not so much to expose the Real, but to expose the viewers’ repression of it, and facilitate in some small way,
their awareness of its existence/absence. This is where the gaze and the uncanny come into play. The objet a of the gaze “fills the gap created by the fact that the real is lost to the subject” (Belsey, 2005, p. 48), yet when it is returned – when the gaze is turned on itself, as seen in the Portraits series’ ‘look back’ (Dixon, 1995, p. 2) for example – there is the potential to, in a sense, empty that gap and reveal it for the nothingness that it is. The Real as lost to the interior self is exposed and with it, the self’s denial of its existence as a void within. Similarly, it is in psychological repression that we may locate the uncanny (Freud, 1919, p. 244). In reflecting back to us that which we hide from ourselves, the returned gaze of cinema and/or video art becomes a possible source of the uncanny for the viewer. And in providing the possibility of revealing the viewers’ repression – or showing it for what it is – there is, I suggest, a psychological exposure that can be nothing but intimate. Within this research, it is my view that it is the nothingness of the Real that is lost to us, and that defines every interior self as transient, that connects us as human beings, and that ultimately drives my praxis.

The exploration of the psychoanalytic theories of the self as proposed by Lacan via Zizek (2010), and the ways in which these notions can be read and experienced visually in the works of artists such as Anna Gaskell, Robbie Cooper and Bill Viola, and via my own creative works, demonstrate the role of praxis as “a way of thinking about action and a way of acting on thought” (Crouch & Pearce, 2012, p. 40). By exhibiting my own works in a variety of sites, I was given the opportunity to reflexively analyse each work within a different setting. Every site offered new ways in which to install the work and, through the writings of theorists’ such as Kate Mondloch, (2007; 2010), new ways in which the viewer might experience them. In the structure of this dissertation, the model of creative praxis has been demonstrated as a means by which this reflexive engagement of each work in their various situs has allowed a greater critical understanding of my work. This, in turn, has afforded me a more complex knowledge pertaining to my work’s communicative aims. What I have found valuable in showing works in multiple settings has been the clarification of the conceptual ideas embedded in the content of the works to their relationship to the viewer. In projected works (e.g. Dis/Integrate; Rooms I-V; Clouds), I located an ephemerality indicative of the ambiguous self that reflected back to the viewer their own transience. In disparate screen sizes, from the small monitor in a gallery (e.g. Breathing Space), to the massive LED screen in a public space (e.g. Suspension), I found the emergence of intimacy (or extimacy) and its relationship to the viewer as a predominant theme of
my work. In both the monitors used in *Transience* for the *Portraits* series, and concurrently, in the projections of *Rooms I-V* in their various permutations, I found a way to explore the notion of the returned gaze or ‘look back’, and also track the absent presence of death that permeates my work, as discussed in Section 3 in relation to the work of Mike Parr (Coulter-Smith & Magon, 1988, p. 22) and in the Zizekian notion of Symbolic suicide (Zizek, 2005, p. 33).

The culmination of my current reflexive praxis is evidenced in the *Transience* (2012) exhibition. The design of the exhibition, influenced by the analogous relationship between Mondloch’s ‘here but not here’ model of double spatial dynamics (2010, p. 62) and the notion of the interior self as existing in two states simultaneously, lay the foundation in creating experiential spaces in which the viewer’s inter-relationship to the work might be explored. In the viewers interaction with the flickering, mirage-like world of the real-not-real, here-not-here animations of *Rooms I-V* (2011-2012), the uncanny sky and its relationship to the telegraph pole in *Clouds* (2009), and the uneasy returned gaze of the entombed *Portraits* (2010), it was my aim that the interior self as hovering on the interstice between the Symbolic and the Real that is lost to it, might be glimpsed. *Transience* (2012) by no means marks the end point of my research of the interior, transient self. In the lost Real and its relationship to the self, there is enough ambiguity to feed a lifetime of creative work. And in its impossibility, its meaninglessness, its elusiveness, there remains, for me, an endless curiosity and a hopeful source of human connection.
REFERENCES


Images

All photographs of the artist’s work taken by the artist unless otherwise stated.


APPENDIX 1
LIST OF PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORKS:

Conference paper

Books
APPENDIX 2
LIST OF EXHIBITIONS:

2012  Transience, PhD graduation show (solo), Spectrum Project Space, Perth, WA
2012  Monster, Oats Gallery, Perth, WA
2012  Suspension, Cultural Centre LED, Perth, WA
2012  Redshift, Perth Centre for Photography, Northbridge, WA
2012  Redshift, Outdoor double projection, North Perth, WA
2011  Bring Your Own Beamer, Galleria Gallery, Perth, WA
2011  Crash, free range, Perth, WA
2011  What I Saw, Darwin Visual Arts Association Gallery, Darwin, NT
2011  Out of the Shadows, Grey Door (in association with Greenhill Galleries)

Emerging), Claremont, Perth, WA
2011  Transience, Breathing Space Gallery, Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA
2010  What I Saw, free range, Perth, WA
2010  The Third Space Project, Shanghai, China and Perth, WA
2010  Subtle, free range, Perth, WA
2009  Ummmm…the Articulate Practitioner, Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Fremantle, WA
2008  Immerse, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, WA
APPENDIX 3
DVD TRANSIENCE (ATTACHED):

Menu

Transience
Rooms I-V
Clouds
Portraits
Gallery tour
In situ

Other Works
Dis/Integrate (2008-2009)
Untitled (2001)

NB: This feature is not available in the electronic version of the dissertation. Click on the video links above each image within the text (as indicated) to access the video work.