

How can that which is beyond articulation be articulated?

Constructions of belief through doubt and faith.

by

Kiron Robinson

BFA (Hons), BA

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Department of Fine Art

Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture

Monash University

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ABSTRACT

The question that began this research is a question about belief. It is primarily a question about form and forming that which cannot be articulated.

Within this research belief has been defined as not-knowledge. Belief is oppositional to knowledge. It requires an action towards an outside of knowledge. It is absurd. Knowledge bases itself on measurable and quantifiable sets of reasoning. Belief is an outworking in spite of reason, an irrational action. It is a paradoxical action of faith. Faith is not faith without doubt. To communicate these actions, which are intrinsically linked to a singular, is tautologically problematic. The communication of belief (through faith and doubt) seeks to bring that which it defines as outside of understanding, into a position of understood.

This research is an investigation into the paradox of this action and the precarious liminal state that it inhabits. It is a forming of an anxious state.

Using a model derived from Søren Kierkegaard's writing *Fear and Trembling* (focusing on the three states of the individual, the universal and the absolute) this research identifies a method of unfolding relationships that seek a position of simultaneity as a propositional position from which to articulate that which is beyond articulation.

Within the studio based outcomes of this research an overarching methodology based on the process of production found within analogue photography is applied to material consideration and selection. It is a manifestation of a photographic way of thinking and questioning, based in limitations, but one that is not necessarily tied to the production of photographs. It is argued that materials are what they are as well as what they are not. It is a methodology that reflects the anxiety inherent in the precariousness that this research inhabits.

The exegesis explores the conceptual reasoning of the paradoxical construction of belief. Addressed in the three states identified through Kierkegaard, the exegesis expands on the central research question with regards to each state and the bearing that these investigations have on each subsequent state. In the first chapter an approach is made through the idea of the individual. The individual is framed in terms of the self, identified through limit, the limit of self that is known through the action of encountering. The second chapter builds upon this idea of self but repositions it within the relationship of the individual and the universal. The third chapter builds a position around the idea of the absolute. This chapter addresses the issue of simultaneousness discussed in both of the previous chapters and introduces the idea of a simultaneous index formed through the relationship that is enacted in the encounter.

This reasoning is paralleled to my own contemporary art practice and argues for a position of simultaneity as a model for articulating questions that may form a propositional state of belief constructed upon faith and doubt.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This exegesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the documentation.

Kiron Robinson

July 2013

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INTRODUCTION

I was having a conversation with a friend over lunch, not long after the birth of my first son, and, amongst other questions, he asked me if I would be bringing my son up with the beliefs that I held. It was a fairly innocent question, of the type that new parents discover litter their talk, but I found myself at a loss as to how to answer. It provoked a *how* question. How, if I so wanted, could I actually do this? How could I articulate my beliefs to another? Are ones beliefs able to be articulated?

When thinking on these questions I was considering belief as more than the outworking or rituals of a belief system. I grew up as the son of parents who were missionaries and pastors of a Christian church; I was confident in my knowledge and grasp of the rituals associated with belief systems. The idea of belief from which I was contemplating these questions was something beyond, more intangible than the systemisation that I had been exposed to. Belief occurred as something that contributed to a forming of a sense of self, yet required a conceptual understanding of separation from the self, a “constitutive belief”.¹

In consideration of the initial question, and the subsequent follow up questions that rushed in on the back of the first, I began to realise a definition of belief. Belief is not-knowledge. Belief is oppositional to knowledge. Knowledge may be attained through belief² but knowledge bases itself on measurable and quantifiable sets of reasoning.

¹ Terry Eagleton, "Faith and Belief," in *Now Is the Time : Art & Theory in the 21st Century*, ed. Jelle Bouwhuis et al.(Rotterdam, New York: Nai Publishers, 2009). 14

² Boris Groys, "Repetition Verses Progress," in *Now Is the Time: Art & Theory in the 21st Century*, ed. Jelle Bouwhuis et al.(Rotterdam, New York: Nai Publishers, 2009).

Belief, on the other hand, is an outworking of an action, an action of faith, in spite of reason, an irrational action. Faith is an intimate action that can only be enacted by the being enacting the action of faith; a tautological action. Faith does not act alone in construction of belief; it is an action that is inclusive of doubt. Faith is not faith without the presence of doubt. Faith without doubt is not faith, it is knowledge. Doubt is the question that persists that keeps knowledge at bay.

The tautological action, of faith and doubt, through which I define belief implies an intrinsic knowledge of self. Within this narrative of belief and the passing on there of, a need to understand this implied position of self is critical. Through being able to define and recognise self, a potential of the limit of self may also be understood. To comprehend a limit of self allows for a potential outside of self into which belief can be projected. Belief requires and potentialises a position outside of certainty, outside of knowledge. This is found outside of self.

When considering belief this way we create extreme difficulties in addressing the question of passing on or communicating ones belief to another. For me to be able to pass my belief on to my son I require an understanding of self, or understanding of the self that I understood as I, from both myself and also my son - this raises its own problems. What did I understand as myself, to say I was able to hold a belief? How was the 'I' that I was looking to define able to conceive of an outside, which is outside of the knowledge of the defined position of I? – it also required the reverse of this from us

(from previous page) 21 -22 Groys argues here that the pursuit of scientific knowledge is based on the notion of progress towards an ultimate truth that is always in a state of delay or fulfillment that is to come, which is really a matter of belief.

both but in relation to my son, an understanding of himself as I to allow a facilitation of passing, from one to another.

If this understanding of I was possible the process of communicating between them while inhabiting both positions raises a particular paradox. As recognised belief enacted through faith and doubt is wholly tautological, it is a solipsistic action. To communicate or articulate my belief would require a conjoining of the selves that differentiate my son from myself, which would result in a dissolution of the selves that differentiate my son from me. Yet without a conjoining there could be no passing of understanding of my action of faith and doubt to my son. At best this theoretical alignment of selves only serves to highlight the separateness of my son to myself and exposes the gap. For even as an idea of self is formed through an idea of self that is known through not-self, the not-self is also formed and an other self cannot cross this limit and still be its own self.

It is a slippery slope where each requirement, separateness and conjoining, dissolves the other required ingredient. All that is left is an action of faith and doubt, which is belief. Belief in belief, the knowing of is only possible through the communicative action, representation.

THE RESEARCH

This lunchtime query regarding parenting strategies raised a series of questions for me that I had not addressed directly in my arts practice to this point. Ideas of faith, ideas of doubt, ideas of failure had existed but had been treated separately. “What do I believe?” had turned to the more essential question of “How do I believe?”, which gave life to the question: *How can that which is beyond articulation be articulated?* At the

heart of this question is a question of form, form that is representation and the possibility of this form to encapsulate or articulate that which it cannot. How can that which is beyond articulation (belief) be communicated through materials and form? The logic inherent in this questioning creates an anxiety, an anxiety wrapped in uncertainty, of belief constructed through faith and doubt.

There is a long history of doubt and faith across religion, philosophy and the arts from the book of Job and the figure of Thomas to the teachings of the Buddha to Socrates and the Skeptics and Romantics, to the more contemporary writings of Salman Rushdie, Boris Groys, Kaja Silverman, and the artworks of Francis Alÿs, Nedko Solakov and others. Through this history the question has been consistent. It has always been a question led by doubt, about how or what, tempered by the representations of faith prevalent in the contemporary of the time. It is into this arena that this research will be entering.

This research has no single manifestation of faith that is trying to be worked through or which is trying to be justified. It is not a questioning led by a religious understanding of the argument of faith. It has alignments to this type of argument but this research is approaching faith and belief on their own terms not restrained by religious dialogue. This research is an opportunity to engage with the paradox of faith and the state of anxiety formed in this engagement. It is a paradox that is mirrored in the state of knowing of life through knowing that there is an end to life. In this ending of being it follows that there is also a position of non-being, another paradox that is the known unknown. It seems that within the experience of living there are many such constructed paradoxes; ideas that express themselves as outside of the very limitations that define them. These aberrant occasions alert the mind to a limit of knowledge, a limit to the systems of definition and articulation, a limit of self. They alert us to an unknown of

which knowledge of is held in potentiality. The potential of knowing (or forming) through the state of not-known. They inhabit the periphery, avoiding any direct address. This resonates with my questioning. It fascinates me and drives this research, which forms my contribution to the conversation of doubt, faith and belief.

This research is divided into two parts. The first (and major part) is an outworking of studio based research manifesting in an exhibition. The investigations that form this part of the research seek to use the physical material within the exhibition's outcomes to manifest the conceptual material of belief's construction, faith and doubt.

Within the studio based outcomes of this research a strategy of material consideration is identified. It is a strategy pertaining to the use of materials that reflects the anxiety and the state of precariousness that is contained within the research question.

As an overarching approach to material selection, production and re-presentation this research identifies with a photographic methodology. It is a photographic way of thinking, seeing and questioning that manifests through text, sound, object and image, both moving and still. It is a way of thinking based in equivalence. Photograph as neon, photograph as sculptural object.

It is a process that I identify particularly with an analogue way of working in photographic production. The production of analogue photographs is based in a series of choices that are caged by limits. From the decisions that are made within the camera craft regarding the relationship between light, lens and film, through to the decisions made in the printing process, each decision is made within a framework of the limit of possibility. Aperture is chosen at the expense of shutter speed or vice-versa, printing a

negative is restricted to the information contained on that negative.³ This is a process that reflects an action of looking, finding and framing that results in selecting and leaving out. It is a process based in choosing rather than imagining, steeped in the idea of representation that results in a questioning of this same idea. To quote Jacques Rancier:

[...] an image is never the solitary embodiment of a reality, but an element in a chain of representation that weaves an understanding of a world through consensus.⁴

This understanding of an image as an individual defined through its relationship with the universal reflects the awareness of the limits identified in the understanding of the self that is needed in any discussion on belief. An understanding of self that is defined through the relationship to the universal while seeking a position outside of this. Within this research this correlation between the studio based research (as identified by Ranci re as image), and the conceptual/philosophical research serves as a key linkage point.

When beginning the studio based research a decision was made to use materials that were both self-consciously aware of their function defined through the context of their assemblage and encounter, and also of their displacement from their original use function. It was decided that this material strategy would be the most appropriate to raise a state of questioning, found through a literal simultaneous state of being, both within the material itself and also extended out, through the encounter, to the viewer.

³ This is a completely different process from digital photography that, through the advent of digital editing tools and programs enables an endless series of choices and editing options that no longer even requires a camera or capture device as a starting point.

⁴ Jacques Ranci re, "What Makes Images Unacceptable", PNCA lecture presented by PNCA + FIVE Idea Studio <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-ULbgFkNZs> (accessed 24 November 2012).

The duality that is articulated through the material choices is a duality that stems from the photographic question of the real and the idea of the real. It is a question centred on the index within the photographic. The index as understood as a trace of the encounter, mediated by the light reflected from the subject of the photograph onto the film. This research proposes an extended understanding of the index found both within the individual elements of the material outcomes and in the relationships that are created through the bearing that each element has on each other within the installation of the whole.

In the Michael Antonioni film *L'Eclisse* the main actress Monica Vitti is described as the “legible register of anxiety in the confrontation with the void.”⁵ The material of the studio research seeks to play the role that Vitti inhabits for Antonioni, a “legible register of anxiety”. An anxiety found through the condition of being simultaneous.

Materials are what they are as well as what they are not.

The second outcome of this research is the exegesis component that is being read now. This writing is a platform that situates the studio based research within the framework of philosophical thought and the relevant field of research with which I am identifying. As stated earlier the history around the questions being raised in this research is long and this research’s engagement with it is selective.

⁵ Gary Indiana, "Identity Check," in *Roni Horn : Well and Truly*, ed. Roni Horn and Yilmaz Dziewior(Bregenz: Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 2010). 31

Structurally this exegesis is following an outline found in the writing of Søren Kierkegaard's treatise *Fear and Trembling*. Within this writing Kierkegaard approaches the question of faith as it relates to him through the Abrahamic story of the sacrifice of Isaac. In this approach he uses three terms to provide a structure for his questioning: the individual, the universal and the absolute. I have chosen to borrow this framework and these terms from Kierkegaard. Each of the terms form an approach to the central question of this research and as each approach is formed its forming will bear upon the subsequent yet different approaches. This borrowing from Kierkegaard has been done for the following reasons.

Kierkegaard is investigating a similar proposition to this research's central question. Kierkegaard sought to articulate an inwardness that was unrationalisable and outside the possibility of articulation. Kierkegaard's endeavour was a response to the Hegelian argument of a philosophical framework or 'system' of Absolute Idealism. Kierkegaard developed an argument outside of the totality that he saw Hegel attempting to define the world through.⁶ My research is attempting a similar question. Articulating that which is outside of articulation.

Within *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard articulates the paradox of faith and the anxiousness of this paradox. My research is also addressing this same paradoxical location and the inherent anxiety in this paradox.

Kierkegaard identifies this paradox of faith through the encounter with the representation of faith which is central to his own belief. Kierkegaard recognises a

⁶ BBC, 2008. "I O T P: Kierkegaard," *In Our Time Archive: Philosophy*, BBC Radio 4. podcast, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b009fycc> (accessed 17 March 2013).

parallel between his authors anxiety, in relation to belief, found in the encounter with the Abraham story and paralleled by Abraham within the story. It is a story that also doubles as part of construction upon which his belief is founded. His material is constructing even as it is pulling down. My material is also asked to do this. It inhabits and defines the very thing that it is also asked to question. It constructs as it brings down.

Kierkegaard's question of faith is located as a question that radiates from a position identified as the self. Through this positioning he is able to expand this question to explore a general idea of belief. This is similar to the position that I identify in my research.

Kierkegaard articulates his encounter with the paradox of faith through the engagement with representation. There is a doubling within Kierkegaard. Through his pseudonym he acknowledges his own faith being built (partly) through this encounter with the representative action. Yet he also looks to find a position of separateness from this representation into which his own belief can exist. This form of question is again similar to my own. Any potential conclusion or resolution is being articulated through the encounter with a representative action, which the conclusions are trying to be outside of.

Kierkegaard uses a reasoning based in the author's deep-set doubt. Doubt found within himself and the methods of his belief that highlight his separateness from the not-known to which he directs his belief. Kierkegaard uses this doubt as his tool to build an understanding for what he openly acknowledges is beyond his understanding. It is this type of reasoned construction of certainty, through all that is unsure, that correlates

with my own questioning manifested through the material outcomes contained within this research.

Art making has a strong association with representation of faith and doubt whether it is a direct representational device (Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* (1600 – 1601)), a metaphorical reflective device (the work of David Casper Friedrich and the sublime painters) or used as a conceptual device (the work of Marcel Duchamp and his readymades). This research situates itself closer to this third area. It seeks to use belief, as defined by faith and doubt, in a structural sense even as it seeks to place belief as subject.

Kierkegaard seeks to understand and outline the search for something that is beyond. For Kierkegaard this search is grounded in the definitions and relationships of the individual, the universal and the absolute.

Within the definitions of these three positions and the relationship between them Kierkegaard plots a course that potentialises the possibility of the beyond. He articulates it as “the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute”,⁷ a position that is outside of the articulation except through the reflection that is representation, effectively through what it is not. He acknowledges a point of paradox within the story and that this point is where difficulties lie, in absolutes, and the need for faith to bridge this paradox. He also acknowledges the paradox that is faith.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. Howard V Hong, and Edna Hong, trans., Howard V Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). 66

Faith is a paradox of existence.⁸

In borrowing the three definitions from Kierkegaard my research is seeking to draw a parallel between Kierkegaard's search, articulated through writing, and my own, articulated through contemporary art practice. This will be addressed in the following way:

Within the first chapter the idea of the individual will be approached. It is a discussion on a proposition of the self that enacts the action of belief and the understanding of the multiplicity of self which is required to open the possibility of articulating that which is beyond. This will be discussed in relation to Emmanuel Levinas' ideas of the Other; Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan's discussion of the gaze and specifically how it relates to the photographic; and some initial introduction of Maurice Blanchot and the distancing occurring through the representative act. This chapter will focus on the outcomes *Drip, Stain, Leak* and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010) and *When I write I write for you*, (2013).

As an outcome of forming the idea for this chapter it became clear that the term "I" was problematic. The term does not give a clear indication of the paradox of the separate and conjoined in relation to the self that is discussed. It was recognised through the discussion developed out of the idea of self, explored in the first chapter, that the subsequent chapters required an adherence to the boundaries that were being outlined. As a result the term 'I' will not appear, outside of quotes and titles of research outcomes being discussed, in any part of the three chapters that form the main component of this exegesis.

⁸ Ibid.

The second chapter will address the idea of the universal, which centres on the understanding of limit of self that is found through commonality. This will be discussed through Bernard Steigler's idea of technicity and a closer reading of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. This chapter will draw a parallel between the point of infinite resignation as identified by Kierkegaard and On Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), series, Francis Alÿs, *Paradox of Praxis: Sometimes making something leads to nothing*, (1997), and Tehching Hsieh durational performance pieces, (particularly *one year performance 1980-1981, (Time clock piece)*, (1980-1981)), through the recognition of the infinite by the finite and will explore the anxiety realised in this recognition and the outworking of this state. This will be discussed in relation to the outcomes *Used Hours/Wasted Hours*, (ongoing) and *Don't forget me (forever)*, (ongoing).

The third chapter will address the absolute, an understanding of which allows for the potentiality to be *outside of* and will be discussed in relation to Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida writings on death or non-being alongside Georges Didi-Huberman discussion on simultaneousness and approaching the liminal. This will be discussed in relation to the outcomes *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011), *I Ham*, (2012), *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, (2012), and *All the names in the world, (Sale)*, (ongoing). It is within this chapter that the idea of the index in relation to the state of simultaneousness, which is recognised by Georges Didi-Huberman, will be discussed.

Within these states and in the relationship between these states this research seeks to open up a place of questioning. It is recognised that the central question driving this research is paradoxical and what is outside of articulation cannot be articulated by the

nature of it being outside. As such, it is subsequently recognised that any potential conclusion can only be found as a state of questioning.

In each of these chapters the various outcomes of the physical outworking of this research will be discussed in relationship with other artists whose work is identified as also being in the field of research that is being undertaken here.

There is a repetition of discussion across the chapters but each return to an idea is focused through the different positions identified as central to the relevant chapter within which it is discussed. This is used as a conceptual strategy to ensure a position of questioning. Fiction is acknowledged as a location from which to raise questions with regards to that which is beyond articulation. Questions around representation and the paradoxical role of the representational form as an end point are raised and the idea of boundaries is approached.

[...] art is experience because it is experiential: because it is a search – an investigation which is not undetermined but is, rather, determined by its indeterminacy, and involves the whole of life, even if it seems to know nothing of life.⁹

In the end it is hoping that through this research I can figure out how to provide an answer for my friend and still have something to say to my son.

⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans., Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). 89

CHAPTER 1 - THE INDIVIDUAL

None of us are ourselves. None of us are like this.¹⁰

In making this claim the protagonist, Gibreel Farishta, in Salman Rushdie's book *the Satanic Verses*, raises the question of what does he mean by self, how does he know the self, to which, in this case, he can claim to not be like? This is a question that is intrinsic to this research. The driving question of this research, *How can that which is beyond articulation be articulated?*, implies a position of self, a position that is implicit as a location from where this question can be raised. It is a position to which definition is critical for forming anything that may contribute towards an answer. This research is arguing that an understanding of self enables a formation of singularity found through limit. This formation of singularity through an awareness of the possibility of limit is an important step for the construction of a potentialised beyond, an allusion to an outside of limit.

This positioning of the potentialised self is directed, in this chapter, to this possibility of the self that is defined and formed against and through the studio based research outcomes. This chapter does not seek to explain these material outcomes but rather situate the questions, around the idea of self, which are being addressed and asked through the outcomes. It is argued that through engaging with the question of self in relation to the material outcomes, a propositional state built upon a platform of doubt, is formed. This platform is precarious, anxious, and fraught. As has been stated in the

¹⁰ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 1st American pbk. ed. (Dover, Delaware: Consortium, 1992). 65

introduction this is the condition of belief: unstable. Belief is the location from which the central question of this research can be engaged.

This exegesis is progressing through a model identified in Søren Kierkegaard's treatise *Fear and Trembling*. Within this Kierkegaard proposes an understanding of the individual defined through a relationship with the universal.

The single individual is the individual who has his (purpose, end) in the universal.¹¹

Throughout *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard seeks to reconcile this seemingly closed loop relationship between the universal and the individual, which dictates his definition of the individual, with the problematic of the relationship of the individual and the absolute. This problem is taken up within this research and will be discussed through the subsequent chapters of this exegesis but within this chapter the individual will be isolated and examined on its own terms as a first point. In looking at the individual (the self) and focussing on its definition and the bearing that this has on the subsequent definitions of universal and absolute, this chapter will begin to unpick some potential ways of addressing the central question of this research.

Using the works *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), from the exhibition *If I take the time will I get it back?*, (2010) and *When I write I write for you*, (2013), from *The Big East*, (2013), as examples of the studio outcome of this research,

¹¹ Kierkegaard. 55

this chapter will explore the notion of the self. It is an idea of self that will be explored in relation to and through the action of the encounter.

Within this action of the encounter multiple positions of self are identified. It will be argued that while being able to be discussed as distinct and separate, the multiplicitious nature of the proposed selves formed through the encounter are interdependent. Within this separate but interdependent relationship the notion of a simultaneous state is introduced. It is primarily through forming a potential understanding of self, a self that is and implies the separate but interdependent selves for an understanding of distinctive singular shape, that a state of aporia can be entered. It is a state of aporia to which this research is concerned with as a central material for the formation of the question of articulation.

This multiplicity is looked at in a number of ways.

On a micro level this relationship between the positions of self are a reflection of the larger logic that frames this research. It is a cohabitated logic, where one thing is not only itself but also its own Other, a logic that is used in the material choices in the studio outcome component of this research, a logic implicit with binaries, that is commonly misunderstood in discussion of belief. Both Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot discuss the relationship between the self and it's own Other as providing a distancing. This idea of distancing one from oneself to form self is central both to this chapter's discussion of self as found and formed through limit and to the broader arguments that define the questioning in this research. This distancing of selves that is part of the formation of the material outcomes of this research will also be discussed

through the work of Roni Horn, Frances Stark, Bas Jan Ader, Richard Prince, Jeff Wall and Miriam Bäckström.

The potential and multiple selves identified and discussed in relation to each other within this chapter are approached from two positions. Through the studio outcomes of this research the self that is formed and forms the work requires first address. It is an introspective approach to the discussion of self, almost to the point of the narcissistic, which privileges a deliberate separateness. It is important to address the idea of the self within the formation of the studio based outcomes from this position of separateness because the premise of belief dictates introspection first and foremost. The second position of self propositions outwardly from the encountered object/action to a more general idea of self, of which the many can be compiled. This leads into the second chapter and the discussion housed within the universal.

The material nature of *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), and the identification of an analogue photographic thinking process as the main methodology in the studio research require that this chapter delve into the photographic. The relationship between the photographic and the gaze and the bearing that this has on the construction of the idea of self will be explored. While the second work, *When I write I write for you*, (2013), is a moving image work, it too will be discussed through this identified methodological way of thinking.

This chapter will also reflect on the object/action of representation, and the role that this plays in formation of the self and indeed in forming its own self.

The interdependence that is defined in the articulation of the self or selves, that leads to a separating for a definition of each position of self also leads to a transference of singularity which results in a failure of intention and a failure of potential. This failure of potential, which is articulated as a failure of material, or more accurately, in an understanding of a repositioning of material, will be discussed as a way to shape the proposition of possibility. It is the first sketch of the outline of what-is-not and it is this outline that suggests a potential for approaching the articulation for that that is beyond articulation or, at least, a location from which to question.

MAKING AND VIEWING: MAKER AS VIEWER AS MAKER

The two images that comprise *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), both as a base image, depict fog filled landscapes with a very low horizon line. They are 102cm x 102cm in size. In the bottom 15cm (approx) of each image, where the horizon is formed, there are skeletal traces of human made structures, remains of frameworks of buildings and fences. The images were formed primarily through what can be conceived of as an analogue photographic process. The images were recorded through a camera onto film that was then subjected to a digital scanning and editing process. This produced a file that was then printed through a chemical printing technique.

Rising up from the bottom border of each image is a sear or burn mark caused by light being leaked directly onto the negative, not mitigated through the shutter of the camera. In fact, operating despite of the action of the shutter, an action designed to control the amount of light allowed to contact the film. Over the top of both images sits, what appears to be, a variety of drips and/or stain marks that have been brought into being through the process of the film being developed and imaged through it's

scanning. These marks have been allowed to remain to inform to the transference of information to the printed image.



Figure 1. Kiron Robinson, *Drip, Stain, Leak*, 2010.



Figure 2. Kiron Robinson, *Leak, Stain, Drip*, 2010.

The two images, mounted onto a di-bond backing, were first presented hung on a wall, side by side with a gap of about 60cm between them. The images are close enough in their physical parameters, size, format, and style, with the location of the burn marks, colour palette, depicted scenery etc, to suggest a similarity that warrants a double look to confirm this similarity or to locate difference.

Walter Benjamin argued in, *The Work of Art in Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, that the idea of the original, the singular, as understood when looking at the art forms pre-photography and film, originated through the idea of a single maker of which there was a single clear understanding. The idea of the authentic and the value associated with this are closely linked to the value found in the uniqueness of the idea of the unique artist, through the traditional understanding of the artist's gesture or touch that implied an artist genius. The reproducibility of the photographic threw that valuation into question.

From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense.¹²

This question of the authentic, formed through the mechanical process of the photographic, upended the notion of the unique maker as well. It brought into question the self that identifies as the artist’s self known through that which is considered the work.¹³

In Roland Barthes’ seminal discussion on the photographic, *Camera Lucida*, he uses the term *Operator* to define the self as it relates to the production of the photographic image.¹⁴ Barthes uses this term to describe the self that composes, focuses, aligns exposure settings and presses the shutter button which results in a photographic image. This choice to use the term *Operator* is an interesting one. This term recognises the separation of the self from the unique creative act of making that Benjamin identifies. Barthes term *Operator* suggests a conduit for which the making process is acknowledged but it is not a making process interlinked with the process that creates. It is a definition of a self more closely akin to the language of production. An *Operator* being the controller whom enables the mechanism, of which they are controlling, to fulfil a predetermined designed function. It is a role that requires only a technical proficiency in the functionality of the mechanism involved, a position devoid of any

¹² Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans., J. A. Underwood, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2008). 12

¹³ While this may be a given in contemporary art theory and practice for this research there is a need to go back into this argument around the idea of the artist. That which is being made and how the function of this making operates, in relation to the idea of self, is a pivotal starting position upon which this research constructs.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida : Reflections on Photography*, trans., Richard Howard, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). 9 “The *Operator* is the *Photographer*.”

creative input outside of the functional range of the operating mechanism's design. The term democratises the once sacred idea of unique maker through the universality of function.

Technically, Photography is at the intersection of two distinct procedures; one of a chemical order: the action of light on certain substances; the other a physical order: the formation of the image through an optical device. It seems to me that the *Spectators* Photograph descended essentially, so to speak, from the chemical revelation of the object (from which I receive, by deferred action, the rays), and the *Operators* Photograph, on the contrary, was linked to the vision framed by the keyhole of the camera obscura. But of that emotion (or of that essence) I could not speak, never having experienced it; ...I possessed only two experiences: that of the observed subject and that of the subject observing [...]¹⁵

Despite this qualification of ignorance, what Barthes suggests here, with the use of the term *Operator*, is an important disjuncture or rupture with regards to the idea of the self as it relates to the making process within the production of the photographic print. It is an engagement with Benjamin in redefining the understanding of the role of the maker position within the photographic process. Looking at Barthes through Benjamin the maker is no longer recognised as the articulator of a unique position, which could be defined as the vision of the artist. Instead through the mechanical process of the photographic medium this position is made moribund. The self who operates the mechanism of the camera, the maker of the image, is detached from the formation or creative act. The reduction to functionary through the mechanical releases the unique touch of the artist from what is recognised as the work. This raises the question of

¹⁵ Ibid. 10

where then does the creative act or the self, linked to the creative act, situate inside these parameters? Barthes extension of Benjamin's argument shifts the creative act as it relates to the production of the photograph, to another. Barthes argues that this 'another' is located in the position of the *spectator* who receives.¹⁶

Barthes is suggesting a self of creator or maker defined through the encounter with the image. Emmanuel Lévinas also addresses this possibility through the action of encountering, through viewing or speaking. For Lévinas the encountering action enables the formation of the image or shadow, which Lévinas argues, everything carries with it and through which the self may be known. He argues that no thing is aware of its self except through the image that is formed through the encounter. Self is known through the shadow, the image of self, the self as self's own Other. Lévinas argues that when the image self is encountered, through the representative act, the possibility of a real self, can be known in potentiality, through the highlighting of its absence.

In art, the sensible does not merely depart from the real. It "insists" on the absence of the object. Splashes of colour, sound, and bits of foreign matter "occupy [the object's] place fully to mark its removal, as though the represented object died, were degraded, were disincarnated in its own reflection."¹⁷

How much more so for the photographic image, which through the doubling of the index, as both a record of an encounter of rays of light reflecting from an object onto a film and as a literal index in which 'this' stands in for 'that', screams this is not me. In

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Lévinas, *The Lévinas Reader*, ed. Séan Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). 136

Lévinas's argument the photograph marks the absence of the object, which is subject, and clearly portrays its shadow, which is image. This allows for some understanding of what it is not, its self.

For Lévinas the Other is in fact the first in understanding and the identity of the self. It precedes the self that is identified by its Other, from an exterior position that is internalised. This relationship is an unpower relationship as opposed by the Oedipal ego power relationship. It is defined by what it is not.¹⁸

Jacques Derrida also discusses this 'defining by what it is not' process to form a self. Building off Lévinas he says;

The subject gives way in this abyssal chasm. But ego utters in it: ego exteriorises itself there, which does not signify that it carries to the outside the visible face of the invisible interior. This literally signifies that ego makes or makes itself exteriority, spacing of places, distancing and strangeness that make up place, and thus space itself, first spatiality of the tracings of a veritable outline in which – as in no other – ego may come forth, trace itself out, and think itself.¹⁹

Barthes, Benjamin, Lévinas and Derrida are all potentialising a multiple number of selves formed through the encounter with the object. It is an understanding of self that is formed through distancing from the other of self that is contained and formed within the encounter.

¹⁸ Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity : Lévinas, Blanchot, and Agamben* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999). 39-40

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans., David Willis (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1995). 27

In Barthes and Benjamin discussion on the formation of the making self they are articulating the action of encountering through viewing the end product of a photographic process, the print.²⁰ In the mechanical production of the photographic image, though, the camera itself replicates the position of the print, that allows for an encounter, and the position of the viewer, who encounters, before the finished print is brought into being. In so doing it brings into being a simultaneous proposition of self for the being operating the camera.

The viewfinder, through which the photographer positions, acts as a first image plane that, allows a separation or distancing to occur from which multiple propositional selves may be formed; the self of the maker, the self of the viewer and the self of the image. Barthes acknowledges this position as the “*Operators Photograph*”²¹ but this still implies a point from which the *Operator* is directing. This research is arguing that what is actually brought into presence here in this encounter through the “keyhole of the camera obscura”²² is an idea of a self of maker that is mediated through a self that is actually a viewer, which Barthes articulates as the “receiver of rays”.²³ It is a position of viewer who is the first viewer.

Drip, Stain, Leak, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), were formed using a medium format Hasselblad camera. With this equipment, when positioning to commit the image to the film surface, composition and focus is done through a plane of glass and a system of mirrors that reflect the conceptual oscillation of the positions of the self,

²⁰ Barthes is at pains to point out that he can only speak about the photographic from this position, as he has not found himself in the position of the *Operator*.

²¹ Barthes. 10

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

between maker/operator to viewer and back again as each encounters the other as Other. The viewing plane when being looked upon requires a ninety degree tangential positioning of the head in relation to where the lens is pointing. This allows for the replacement of reality by the representation,²⁴ a chance to enact the removing of the reflection of reality from itself. What is seen on the glass plane is in a state no longer inhabiting the physical location it reflects and not yet in the state it will be committed to in a print. It has no relationship to the real except through this thin representation. A point exaggerated by the bodily positioning required for looking by the mechanism of the Hasselblad camera. It is a positioning and a change that can only be known through the process of production. It is through a declaration of a self as maker, which is the production process, which can only be known from the position of the self as a viewer, which enables a shifting.

The idea of the shifting of formation of self, that is activated through the encounter on the plane of the viewfinder, leans heavily on the Lacanian discussion on the gaze and its bearing on an understanding of self. Lacan expands this identification of self as subject observing with his experience of encountering sunlight reflecting off a floating sardine can while fishing.

One day, I was on a small boat with a few people from a family of fishermen[...]as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean[...]pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can[...]It glittered in the sun.

²⁴ Hal Foster and others, *Art since 1900 : Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004). 589

And Petit-Jean said to me – *You see that can? Do you see it? Well it doesn't see you.*²⁵

For Lacan this realisation, caused through a rupture of the viewing surface, alerted him to his self as viewer, an encounter with his own Other, and simultaneously formed a position of self which was brought into being through his awareness of its absence. Henry Krips in his critique of Joan Copjec and the Lacanian gaze summarises Lacan's response in this way:

[...] the gaze is grounded in a concrete object: a sardine can that sporadically catches the light and blinds the young Lacan. In and of itself the object is of no significance, a shiny piece of industrial waste floating on the sea. But the physiological discomfort occasioned by the flashes of light from the can blends with and reinforces a qualitatively similar affect in the young Lacan that comes from a quite different source. To be specific, he experiences a feeling of discomfort, which, rather than physiological in origin, is occasioned by a lurking political guilt at his own privileged position in relation to the working class fishermen. As a result, the flashes of light bring to the surface, indeed create in the young Lacan a palpable and excessive anxiety, even shame, about who he is and what he is doing. (This is what Freud calls "unrealistic anxiety" – an anxiety that is in excess of what its apparent object merits). In short, the discomfort that accompanies the physiological difficulty that the young Lacan experiences in looking at the can contributes to a self-centred anxiety about this identity. This anxiety, in turn, is transformed into an experience of being

²⁵ Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1994). 95

externally scrutinized – an anonymous look from elsewhere by an invisible other before whom the young Lacan is reduced to anxiety and shame.²⁶

If looked at through Lévinas, Lacan is encountering his own Other. The Other that is known through the awareness of the action of viewing. In becoming alert to his looking, through the encounter with the reflection of that action highlighted by the disturbance of the viewing plane via the sun striking the sardine can, Lacan became aware of himself through understanding what he was not, in this case himself as the fishermen, which Krips argues induces a shame.

It is awareness of his position as Other, that is made possible through the encounter, echoed by Barthes, and which results in a distancing within and of the self from the self.

I am the reference of every photograph and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it that I am alive here and now?²⁷

In *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), this process encountered first on the plane of the viewfinder is highlighted by the marks resulting from the process of the formation of the images. In indexing the normally de-emphasised process of formation they act as a constant reminder that an image is being observed, and of the subject observing through and as a result of being the subject being

²⁶ Henry Krips, "The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Žižek," *Culture Unbound* 2(2010). <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se> (accessed 14 May 2012). 92-93

²⁷ Barthes. 176

observed. It is through this process that a distance is formed. A distance between Other and self which marks both Other and self. There is a double representative action here. The burn marks (which themselves are representative of the indexical process) alert to the self of the maker in relation to the self that is the first viewer but also through the indexical representative action alerting to the representation of a self as maker to any viewer.

Michel Foucault writing on Blanchot argues for this distance. Through Blanchot he recognises that this distance is formed through the idea of speaking.

‘I speak’ runs counter to ‘I think’. ‘I think’ led to the indubitable certainty of the ‘I’ and its existence; ‘I speak’, on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear.²⁸

Similarly in *On Touching*, Derrida discusses a distancing of the ego to form the ego. Whereas Barthes and Lacan situate the point of distancing as occurring through the action of looking, Derrida and Blanchot through Foucault push this distancing through the site, the orifice, of the mouth, through speaking.²⁹

This correlates much closer to the action, or the point of the image being exposed to the action, of forming within the photographic process through the opening and releasing of the shutter. The mouth is the “place which is non-place” or the “locus of

²⁸ Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot, *Foucault/Blanchot : Maurice Blanchot : The Thought from Outside*, trans., Brian Massumi (New York, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Zone Books, 1987). 13

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans., Christine Irizarry, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005). 28 - 29

dis-location”,³⁰ that is internal and external, and so too is the site created in the action of the closing and releasing of the shutter. This is the cavity that is both interior and exterior. This is the locus of the site at which the potentiality remains infinite, but also at the point when reached for, when contact is sought and form given through the exposure of film to light, that is eluded and the infinite becomes finite.

If the lens reflects the orifice of the mouth, the “locus of dislocation”,³¹ where distancing is formed, the “outline in which ego may come forth”,³² then the glass viewing plane is the moment of simultaneous formation and separation of self. It is upon this thin reflection, this almost formed representation, which the projected chimera of both the self of the maker and the viewer, through the possibility of the self of the work, is reflected but held only as an outline. The self of image, against whom the self as viewer and subsequently the self as maker define, is not fully located; an action of looking and encountering is highlighted but the potentialities are not committed to or committed against but rather they are suggested, they are held in the position of potential. This position simultaneously indexes three positions of a self; as maker, viewer and object. It is an index in the reflection of the touch through the encounter. Just as the photographic image is an index of the encounter of the touch of light against film, so too is the image on the glass plane an index of the process of forming of the self. It is an encounter that is touched through looking and reflects the forming of self that is formed through this touch. The lightness or thinness of being that the image formed on the viewfinder glass is the same as the reflection from the sardine can for Lacan. It is an alert to the action of viewing and being viewed.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

What formalisation occurs comes at the point of commitment, the point of pressing the shutter and exposing the sensitised film to the light. In this action an irreversible set of reactions are selected and fixed into a singular form that splinters apart the potential position of the three interdependent, identified selves and brings into being the non-being of all potential.

The action of the opening and closing of the camera's shutter literalises a closing down of potentiality; the potentiality of preconception. All that could have been up until the point of the shutter being opened and closed to light and the light hitting the emulsion of the film fixing (what up until this scission was speculative and fluid), has been made non-existent by the commitment to forming into image. This action of closing down the potentialities of what could have been has also fixed the object (from which light was reflected), into the arena of representation, whose relationship to the real can now only be traced backwards through the index of this act; the image. This is an enacting of failure; the failure of representation.

REPRESENTATION AND LIMIT

Every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self.³³

Marcel Proust's proposition here raises a question around the position providing the framework from which to read that also implies that which is read. The position of awareness of self, which Barthes and Lacan identify as being triggered through the gaze of the object, reflects the idea of self known through the reflection. A self, known from outside, a recognition of Lévinas' Other.

³³ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, ed. Christopher Prendergast, trans., Lydia Davis et al., vol. 6, *Time Regained* (London: Allen Lane, 2002). 274

It is the self of the representative act engaged in the encounter. It is the self that has been described up to this point as the self of the object. The singularity that is pushed against that enables the singularity of the self of the maker, and the maker as viewer and subsequently the viewer and the viewer as maker, to be defined against.

This second section of this first chapter will focus on this self, the self of and as representation and the potential of limit in the encounter with this self.

Image neutralises us (the viewer) the living/physical relationship with the real object, the primary conceiving through action.³⁴

Lévinas has outlined this encounter with the representative object/action as allowing knowledge of self to be formed through knowing of the shadow of self. Of knowing what self is not that contains a proposition of what may be. The knowing through proposition creates a precarious state; an anxious state, that correlates to the state in which belief inhabits.

In her work *Kira Carpelan*, (2007), Miriam Bäckström articulates this state of anxiety of this proposition and shifting foundation of the representative action/object upon which this proposition is formed. It is a work that through the attempt at articulating this paradoxically closed loop, through a series of collapses between the multiple positions of self, articulates the inherent uncertainty in this position.

³⁴ Lévinas. 132

Bäckström's single channel video work depicts her preparation for an upcoming exhibition. For this exhibition Bäckström decides to ask a proxy, an art school student with whom she has contact, Kira Carpelan, to execute the work in its entirety for her, to be her. To facilitate and commit to the proposition of a complete proxy Bäckström allows Carpelan access to all of her resources including Bäckström herself. The only condition that Bäckström imposes is that she be able to record the process to use in making another piece of work to be titled *Kira Carpelan*. Carpelan chooses to make a film starring an actress from one of Bäckström's earlier video works to whom she also gives instruction to choose another actor to work with. The actress chooses Bäckström herself.

The end result is a video of the making of a video in which the artist appears as the artist, the artist acting herself, the artist acting someone else acting herself, the main character acting as the artist, the main character acting as the artist directing the artist to act as the main character and the main character acting herself. Also brought into the work, *Kira Carpelan*, (2007), are other art figures, curators, gallerists and actors who are depicted playing both them and fictionalised versions of themselves, all of whom are involved in the presentation or production of both of the resulting works in the real. Tangled within this shifting of characters, actors, artists and artwork is a questioning of the complicated relationship between the self of the artist as maker, the self of the viewer and the self of the work and the attempt at the articulation of these that seek to form a singularity.

I became an image depicting Miriam Bäckström and, possibly, Kira Carpelan.³⁵

³⁵ Jennifer Allen, "1000 Words Miriam Bäckström and Kira Carpelan," *Artforum International* 45, no. 8 (2007). 244

This image of Bäckström and Carpelan portrayed through the character played by Bäckström is a representation through fiction. The problematic nature of this was vocalised through the character of Miriam Bäckström,

The fiction is not without problems since it will become very present and very real.³⁶

It is an interesting problem as articulated through this work. Each component is aware of its position as itself and also as the representation of itself, representation of another self and in some instances its representation of its own other, which if Lévinas' logic is followed, is its self.

Gary Indiana, in his catalogue essay accompanying the exhibition of Roni Horn, *Well and Truly*, (2010) also articulates this issue of representation and the self that he sees Horn grappling with within the work.

However, just as the characters of a dream are said to each to be different facets of the dreamer, the actor can never entirely claim that the character she depicts is *not her*.³⁷

Similar to Bäckström it is through a strategy of doubling and repetition (in Horns case, of objects, images and drawings), that Horn extrapolates her questions around

³⁶ Miriam Bäckström, *Kira Carpelan* (Lund, Sweden: Lunds Konsthall), video.

³⁷ Indiana. 28

representation and the self and the forming of the self through a distancing of the self and its Other. The question that is raised is a question of location. In the doubling that is occurring within both these artists' works there is an acknowledgement of the limit of self, of the existence of the singularity of self but in the uncertainty of this position, the anxiety of trying to locate it is also acknowledged. It is a question that Indiana has summed up well in his assertion, "[...] the actor can never entirely claim that the character she depicts is *not her*."³⁸ This is the problem of limit, of defining limit.

As has been argued by both Lévinas and Blanchot the approach to limit is one that highlights distance or the space that is apparent through the recognition of the self through the recognition of the Other to form the self. Derrida proposes this position, as a place beyond, that can only be known through that which it is not:

But by definition, limit, *Limit itself*, seems deprived of a body. Limit is not to be touched and does not touch itself; it does not let itself be touched, and steals away at touch, which either never attains it or trespasses on it forever.³⁹

For as limit is approached it slips away, it eludes the declarative definition of 'there it is' like a proverbial rainbow whose end is present but always out of reach.

For Horn this is a constant question within her work. She succinctly addresses this in her work *Aka*, (2008 – 2009) in which 15 paired photographs of Horn are displayed. They are arranged in a seemingly, but not overtly stated, formal logic related to facial expressions and compositional alignments. The photographs, in the production of

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*. 6

which Horn did not operate the camera, are dated across Horn's life from early childhood to the near present of the work's resolution. As stated, doubling and repetition are strategies that permeate Horn's career but in this instance she directly addresses the multiplicity of her self as maker, object and viewer and, through the medium of photography, articulates the fluidity and instability of the fixedness of these positions. Horn creates a platform for the questions around the idea of self and the representation of self to be raised.

A position is proposed that aligns with Proust's proposition above. Horn proposes herself as maker through viewing her representational self as object, but in this proposal, also denies access to the singularity that is formed. Its resolution as 30 framed images not only creates distance between each position addressed through its forming, but also holds itself away by the very nature of the singularity it proposes, from the secondary encounter of other viewers. The enclosed self question for Roni Horn can only ever be encountered through the representation and as Lévinas argues, this removes the possibility for the encounter with the real.⁴⁰ And yet Indiana's question still remains, the doubt present in the inability to declaratively say 'this is my self', allows for the potential for any and every to be Horn's self, but only in potential, and simultaneously for none.

In the forming of the self of the art object/action, through (or more accurately against) which the self of the viewer and maker can be understood, the outline for what is not is also formed and also lost. It is a simultaneous forming and un-forming that is occurring through the action of approaching the limit of self.

⁴⁰ Lévinas.p 132

What then is revealed about limit in relation to the gaze, the gaze that touches the action/object of representation? Once this idea of limit is introduced then it is clearer to see that this object can be seen as *being* the distance that Blanchot and Lévinas both talk about, the distance to the real and in relation to the idea of self, the distance to the self.

Séan Hand in his introductory notes to Lévinas' essay, *The Other in Proust*, describes it as thus,

The artist differs from the philosopher in creating the object through images whose hypnotic quality has no sense of utility. The resulting ambiguous and indeterminate view of the world is resulted from the idea that each thought or act is accompanied by counter-acts or shadows. This leads to the self searching for itself which in turn leads to the self encountering the other in itself.⁴¹

If limit cannot be reached then how is it conceived? How is the self known to know the limit of self?

It is in potentiality, which can be found through the failure of potentiality that has been touched on already, a failure made known through approaching the limit of self.

In *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Drip, Stain*, (2010) the material of the paper houses the trace of the encounter between the light and the emulsion on the film,

⁴¹ Ibid.161

mediated through the camera. The paper itself has undergone its own encounter with light that, after a further chemical process, fixes the traces of this process and the initial light to film process. In its first exhibiting the paper record was mounted onto a di-bond surface and hung to a rendered brick wall. This is the final selection of a series of potential arrangements enacted by the self of the first viewer, defined and further given over to other viewers to enact another position of creator of potentiality. A position, while embedded in any encounter, is self consciously referenced in relation to *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Drip, Stain*, (2010), through the decision to retain the marks of the process of formation. It is a self-reflective action, a doubling of acknowledgment of looking and being looked upon.

All that was lost in the fixation of the image (in the act of settling on a first potential arrangement), that is in that point of the opening and closing the shutter, concluded the potentiality of everything that is not the subject, is not, however, regained through the encounter between the viewed and the viewer. Rather a new set of potentialities is opened up, the potentialities of being viewed and viewing.

For the abdication of the voice of the artist allows for the critic, of which every viewer is one to enact an “intervention of the understanding necessary for integrating the inhumanity and inversion of art into human life and into mind”.⁴²

This is also argued by Blanchot who sees “reading not as the resurrection of the author but the bringing forth of the work”.⁴³

⁴² Ibid. 131

⁴³ Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze : Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred*, Religion and Postmodernism. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). 167

Is this an abdication of the voice of the self of the maker? The voice of the maker, it has been argued up to this point, is known only through the Other of the maker as first viewer, through the (not really abdicated but rather muted) voice of the self of the object. This model proposed in the first part of this chapter, as it relates to the first viewer, can be extrapolated out as a model for any viewer. In this expanded model the maker is not the first viewer of the work, but is the self of maker as viewer, the maker of any meaning or understanding through interpretation or as Blanchot's self "who brings forth the work".⁴⁴

The self of the work cannot hold any expressive sense of self through itself but only within relationship found through the encounter that in the same action enacts failure. The failure that is inherent in any encounter or communicative action, which cannot deliver the self, but rather only its Other through resemblance;

We will say that the thing is itself and is its image. And that relationship between the thing and its image is resemblance.⁴⁵

This sets up the paradoxical position of simultaneousness.

Being is not only itself, it escapes itself.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid. 167

⁴⁵ Lévinas. 135

⁴⁶ Ibid. 135

There is a gap opened up in this intention of the self of the maker to the actuality of the art object as the viewer encounters it and it encounters the viewer. This gap, which is always coming as it is in any encounter, is a gap that is carried and brought into actualisation at the moment of creation, which this research is suggesting occurs at the point of awareness of the self of resemblance, of viewer.

It is the site of the transformation of the ego, the exteriorisation of the ego, the ego of the art object or image. Not, it must be noted, an exteriorisation of an internal ego but the exteriorisation of ego, a forming of itself.⁴⁷

This is not to say that the moment did not already exist. There are always many potential others, that while held in their potentiality, are discarded through the actualisation of becoming, a singular action, which only gains selfhood through the viewed.

By perspective (or any other conventional means ...) the lines, the drawing are “strained” and lose the nearly of the “always possible” – with moreover the irony to have *chosen* the body or original object which *inevitably becomes* according to this perspective (or other convention).⁴⁸

This note, by Marcel Duchamp, was written during the formation of his seminal work *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*, (1923). Again here the implication is that there are many possible becomings or singularhoods that are lost, as the artist inhabits the position of first viewer. These multiple becomings that occupy a state of

⁴⁷ Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*. 27

⁴⁸ Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, A Da Capo Paperback (New York, New York: Da Capo Press, 1989). 36

potential, but which are also discarded through the action of becoming, are still inevitably potentialities that reside in the viewing and so it is the object (in this case of *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*) that acts as a filter for potentiality by being the viewed. This process of viewing and being viewed operates like a double helix with each exerting pressure on the other and defining the other through their own self, a self that is realised because and through the interaction with the other.

So the pressure of the intention in *Drip, Stain, Leak, (2010)*, and *Leak, Stain, Drip, (2010)*, to create pressure, in the movement through the perpetual positioning of the self between maker, object, and viewer shifts to a pressure of reaction. The intended pressure is no more than a representation of itself and cannot hold the pressure that was sought for when held in a preformed position, where all potentials existed.

This failure of intention or the failure found in and through the intentional action, is acknowledged in the materiality of the images within *Drip, Stain, Leak, (2010)* and *Leak, Stain, Drip, (2010)*. The represented disfigurement interrupts the projection of the viewer's gaze into the potential of the Romantic⁴⁹ imagery. Instead the image surface, in its refined presentation, which is as an act of craftsmanship generally used to enhance the illusion of the representative nature of the image allowing a projective action to occur, is reversed. The disfigurement uses the illusionistic quality inherent in all photographs to enhance the idea of the disfigurement. It drives the eye of the viewer back to the surface, or at least an awareness of surface (because it is only ever the

⁴⁹ It is a deliberate use of imagery that can be aligned to that of the Romantic tradition. The grandeur and awe of nature compared to the finiteness of man articulated through an aesthetic experience. Within Romanticism this imagery presented in an immersive form, big, overwhelming, to allow for the viewer to enter into the space of the image easily and imaginatively remove themselves from their real-time location into the representative space provided. For example works by artists such as David Friedrich, Turner and Delacroix.

surface that is encountered when viewing photographs), and the surface value of the material from which it is created.

This is a strategy borrowed somewhat from the work of Jeff Wall, specifically his larger light box works. These are formed through the conjunction of two pieces of transparency film. The joining of the two pieces leaves a clear and distinct line at the point of the join that traverses the images either horizontally or vertically at around the relevant halfway point. For example *A sudden gust of wind (after Hokusai)*, (1993), or *Untangling*, (1994).⁵⁰ Wall himself talks about this obfuscation of the illusionistic view as a device that brings the viewer back to the plane of the image to realise that it is a photograph that is being viewed.

The join between the two pictures brings your eye up to the surface again and creates a dialectic [...] A dialectic between depth and flatness.⁵¹

Similarly to Bäckström and Horn it is a self-conscious fore fronting of the anxiousness of such a tenuous declarative position. In trying to declare, to articulate, the images are highlighting the failure of the intention; the failure of articulation to declare anything but itself that is only ever enacted through the encounter and through the encounter is lost to the Other of the encounterer.

The ultimate wisdom of the photographic is to say: “There is the surface. Now think – or rather feel, intuit this way.” Photographs, which cannot themselves

⁵⁰ Although in some reproductions of these images the joining line is removed.

⁵¹ Jean-Pierre Krief and Alex Szalat, *Contacts 2 the Renewal of Contemporary Photography* (Paris: Arte France/KS Visions,), DVD.

explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation and fantasy.⁵²

It is this representation that frames what it is not.

Susan Sontag, in the quote above, is speaking from an understanding of the idea of the index as argued through Barthes, outlined in *Camera Lucida*, as that-has-been.⁵³

Richard Prince also articulates this position through his works utilising the act of re-photography, constructing photographs of photographic images. When pushed through Barthes' index lens, Prince's photographs refer to the "that-has-been" reality of the image. The act of *re-photographing* removes them from the problem of the reference of the real of the subject depicted. Rather, they sit in the realm of fiction, a fiction that is based on the extension of the fiction (or viewer reflected illusion), which Sontag (and indeed Bäckström and Horn in relation to their own work), is referring to.

The ambiguity of Prince's rephotographs is that they are at once 'more' than life, and empty. By attributing to the rephotograph the status of a fiction, Prince allows it not to represent reality, whether mimetically or indexically, but rather to 'imagine' it. This imagined reality of the photograph is pure possibility, a

⁵² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979). 23

⁵³ It is a general outlining through Barthes discussion on the photographic rather than a specific statement. The acquiescence into the death pathos, implied within Barthes discussion on photography, requires a tacit agreement of the state of photographic practice still having an ontological relationship with the real, through touch, and it is to this that this research is arguing that Sontag is referring. This idea of the index within the photographic that indicates "that-has-been".

possibility that will never be fulfilled and will never disappoint. ...We are not asked to doubt the images for the sake of something more real behind them.⁵⁴

Drip, Stain, Leak, (2010), and *Leak Stain, Drip*, (2010), seeks to extend the idea of the index to the more self-referential that-has-been which includes the action of having-been-done. It is in this representative action of an action within which the outline of what is not articulated (of the other potentialities which exist in their absence) obliquely begins to form. It is through the idea of the disruption caused by the representation of disfigurement that this awareness of what is not, may come into being.

[...] so a thought at the moment of its erasure still influences through its erased meaning; its different meanings participate with one another.⁵⁵

As Prince's work signifies itself so too does *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak Stain, Drip*, (2010), and in this self-signification what is not is also signified.

At one blow, it forms *itself* as *I* in a convulsion; it experiences *I*; it thinks itself *I*.⁵⁶

This self of the work that is representation is the self of language. The self that realises on nothing but sheer appearance.⁵⁷ It is the self of the parAlÿsed moment that suggests a present but is held to a past, a 'was'.

⁵⁴ Michael Newman, *Richard Prince : Untitled (Couple)*, One Work. (London: Afterall Books, 2006). 106

⁵⁵ Lévinas. 146

⁵⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego sum*, (Flammarion: Paris, 1979): 157, quoted in Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*. 32

The imminence of the future lasts before an instant stripped of the essential characteristics of the present, its evanescence. It (image) will never have completed its task as a present, as though reality withdrew from its own reality and left it powerless.⁵⁸

When I write I write for you, (2013), is a single channel video. It is a single take in which the upper torso and head of a man, who has the appearance of being in his late twenties in age, can be seen. The protagonist is relaying a story of his relationship to his mother as mediated through an incident involving his younger half-brother. The footage is shot in a style that can be aligned to the Cinéma Vérité genre; hand held camera work, no overdubbing or post mixing of sound, amongst other techniques used. There are no cuts apparent which, combined with the Cinéma Vérité techniques, lend a confessional authenticity to the story that is being relayed.



Figure 3. Kiron Robinson, *When I write I write for you*, 2013.

⁵⁷ Lévinas. 138

⁵⁸ Ibid. 138 my parenthesis

It was a video derived out of a conversation with a work colleague who relayed the story in a conversation about family. He was asked to re-tell this story to a camera set up in his bedroom as though it was the first time he was telling the story.⁵⁹ Essentially he was being asked to act himself, to hold a vision or representation of himself being himself or, to articulate it (as is being argued in this chapter) whilst being conscious of his simultaneous role as viewer and viewed of and to himself. To be his reflection of himself as mediated through the action of being observed.

The work draws whoever devotes himself to it toward the point where it withstands its impossibility. The work comes through this test and is, in this respect, experience. [...] “experience” here means contact with being, renewal of oneself in this contact - an experiment, but one that remains undetermined.⁶⁰

When I write I write for you, (2013), propositions this possibility, this Blanchotian experience of ‘contact with being’. In this case, a contact with being-as-its-own-representation and the possibility of this leading to being-as-it’s-own-Other and therefore it’s own self. Strategically it is using similar tools used by Miriam Bäckström in *Kira Carpelan*, through a fictive questioning of reality: or forms aligned with the representation of reality, the question of self is raised. What is the self that is being presented and what is the self that is viewing and questioning? The actor in *When I write I write for you*, (2010), enacts this self reflective process and presents the fiction of his self to himself firstly. He simultaneously enacts the role of the viewer and maker as they are formed through the work and he simultaneously enacts the representative action that is the distance between these positions, and that forms these positions.

⁵⁹ It took two takes to reach the final version. It was important for the premise of the work for the actor to see himself acting himself rather than just imagine the first delivery.

⁶⁰ Blanchot. 82

Frances Stark produced the work *My Best Thing*, (2011), which asks a similar set of questions. Within this work she relived out two relationships established through online video chat forums. Instead of using herself or having actors play the roles, she used avatars designed through *Xtranormal*, an online animation site. The works follow the two relationships as they flirt, dance, have online sex and discuss the possibility of forming some work that will be used in her commission for the upcoming Venice Biennale, at which she ultimately presented *My Best Thing*, (2011). Stark has described herself in the process of producing this work as “performing herself”.⁶¹ Similar to the role the actor was asked to play in *When I write I write for you*, (2013).

Both *When I write I write for you*, (2013), and *My Best Thing*, (2011), through the attempt to create contact with being (in these cases the subject relaying the story and Stark herself), are pre-empting the experience that is enacted in the encounter with the representation of their initial encounters. The encounter results in an articulation of the distance between the self of the maker, viewer and self of the work, while simultaneously forming all three positions.

WHATEVER SELF. THE SELF OF POTENTIAL.

To conclude this chapter one more artist, whose work engages in this slippery business of simultaneousness in relation to self, will be addressed. Bas Jan Ader’s work plays out the distancing act that simultaneously separates, defines and cements the interdependence of the multiple selves that have been discussed. *I’m too sad to tell you*, (1971), in which a close shot of the upper body and head of the artist depicts a

⁶¹ Adrian Buitenhuis, "Frances Stark - My Best Thing", Contemporary Art Gallery Vancouver <http://vimeo.com/38244867> (accessed 20 December 2012).

scene of the artist crying (directly facing the camera for the duration of the video), and the earlier, *Please don't leave me*, (1969), a wall drawing of the phrase “please don't leave me” (lit through a single freestanding light angled across the text), both create a question around who is the implied Other present in this work. From this doubtful inconclusive platform it becomes a question that can be broadened out and reflected upon by any who intersect these works. Using an emotive;

[...] appeal to an other not to go. It is a spoken act that seeks to provoke (re-) actions in the real world. It is a spell put on someone to make him or her to stay. To see this appeal is to see its effect on you. The formula talks to you like a person would. You feel the eyes of someone on you and a look of despair directed towards you when you read it. For the phrase is like a movie or a melodrama contained in a single statement; and like a movie or melodrama it is designed to move you.⁶²

Jan Verwoert is arguing that it is a you that is not the self of the work. Whether it is the you that is the Other in Ader himself (known through his position of first viewer) or a you of any subsequent viewer that is outside of the work encountering it. Verwoert argues it is strategy that Ader uses to;

[...] point towards infinity as an idea that eludes rational comprehension, and therefore become the object of yearning.⁶³

⁶² Jan Verwoert, *Bas Jan Ader : In Search of the Miraculous, One Work* (London: Afterall Books, 2006). 23

⁶³ Ibid. 15

The infinity of the separateness that is created through the recognition of the Other with, and against which the self is outlined, is Ader's sting in the tail. There is an impotency acknowledged in the declarative self of the work. It can enact no function unless ceded to through the encounter. Even in its forming it is dependent upon the encounter with the first viewer to receive form and in so forming it also forms through limit an infinity that can not be broached. It calls to its own impossibility as it has already left and cries tears for this failure to touch, to conjoin.

It is through failure, that fiction of potential, that faith is activated. It is the step into fiction that signals the failure and raises doubt as an active agent and through this doubt the potential of faith is given being. It is in the potential of faith that the potential of a knowing of the indefinable resides, because it is faith, upon which belief is built, that suspends the need for logic. It allows a space for a potentiality for that which exists beyond; that which by its own definition is outside of definition.

This space of fiction, where a potential of self is known through the representing of what it is not (which also articulates the failure of intention in the encountered action), aligns with the concept of the *Whatever* as articulated by Giorgio Agamben.

The coming being is whatever being.⁶⁴

Whatever being is being whose Being is perpetually delayed, retarded, or approached, for "all it predicates" is not a possibility for whatever being. Rather,

⁶⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans., Michael Hardt, Theory out of Bounds (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). 1

it is an impossibility that continually shimmers beside it, in an empty imaginary space “reserved” for it but never occupied.⁶⁵

Whatever is the potential for exactly that. It is potential. The moment form is realised through language it ceases to be whatever and becomes actualised. Potential has been lost. The paradox of potential is that it can never be realised. It can only ever be potential, an unknown. It cannot enter into a state of known. It can only be oblique, unstable and elusive. An ontological notion of possibility: “to be plus the power to be”.⁶⁶

In the conversation around the formation of self, *Whatever* is the self that is located within the self-defined loop of selfness. The self that is only knowable to the self that inhabits the loop. Outside of this it is representation only and any encounter that occurs with articulation of this idea forms another self contained loop that defines another set of selves that again is only known to the self that is formed. In the same way the self of the holder of belief is only known through its formation and only knowable to the self that is the former.

Whatever exposes a relation between a real being and an empty totality, a non-thing, a nothing that renders this real being a *Whateverness*.⁶⁷ It is a space of emptiness that can't be formed, but can only be formed against, but in forming against insinuates the *Whatever*. It is this space that *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Drip, Stain*, (2010), suggests or forms against. It is in the *Whatever* that the failure is inherent. The failure

⁶⁵ Wall.p 124

⁶⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). 42

⁶⁷ Wall. 125

known through the *Whatever* that suggests the emptiness no more, the potentiality no more, the defining of form through which the non-form can be known. It is through this action that failure is given its materiality. A materiality totally residing in its inability to not be, but only to suggest that it once was not. It is this space of the *Whatever* that this research is implying is being implied. This is the space for that which is outside of articulation. That by its own definition is beyond definition. It is defined as beyond, it cannot be defined but only alluded to and it is in the alluding that it can be acknowledged and so is doubtful.

No one believes anymore in the art's ability to offer an adequate, genuinely realistic image of the external reality or to manifest authentically the inner states of the "human soul". However, the article of faith that the actual existence of an artist who "makes" art is necessary for art to be created remains largely undiminished.⁶⁸

For nobody knows himself, if he is only himself and not another at the same time.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form : Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010). 125

⁶⁹ Frances Stark and Ribas Joao (eds), "Frances Stark: This Could Become a Gimick [Sic] or an Honest Articulation of the Workings of the Mind," (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Visual Arts Center, 2010). 110

CHAPTER 2 – THE UNIVERSAL

The first chapter of this exegesis outlined an idea of the singular defined through the relationship of the self and its own other. A relationship drawn through the art making process that argued for an understanding of the idea of self that is multiple, but interdependent, which creates a position of potentiality from which to question or proposition the possibility of articulating, that which is outside of articulation. The first chapter used a definition of the individual derived from Kierkegaard's treatise, *Fear and Trembling*. The individual was discussed in relation to the formation of limit and it was argued that in forming limit an allowance for the potential of beyond or outside of limit is also formed. This second chapter, reflecting the unfolding nature of this research, builds upon this discussion of the individual, or self, in relation to the second part of Kierkegaard's exploration into belief; the universal.

Using the material outcomes *Used Hours/Wasted Hours*, (ongoing), which has (at the point of writing) three permutations and the series titled *Don't forget me (forever)*, (ongoing), this chapter further explores the idea of limit and the bearing that this has upon the self. It is limit, though, that is defined through the communal - Kierkegaard's universal. Specifically this chapter focuses on Kierkegaard's use of the universal in defining both the ideas of the individual and the absolute. Through this defining process it will seek to understand the role the universal plays in providing the space for the potential relationship between the individual and the universal as a place outside of articulation. These ideas will be addressed alongside of the works of artists On Kawara, Francis Alÿs and Tehching Hsieh whose work similarly investigates the idea of limit encountered through universality.

For Kierkegaard the relationship between the individual and the universal is critical to understanding the potential relationship between the individual and the absolute, as it is also to this research.

As with the first chapter the possibilities that are suggested here can only ever be suggested as potential, as outline, knowable by what-is-not rather than by any definitive what-is. It is a position of precariousness and anxiety and this is reflected in the material outcomes. This anxiousness will also be reflected in this written outcome as ideas that have been discussed in the first chapter are revisited and discussed under the new prism of the universal.

THE UNIVERSAL

What is this universal?

Kierkegaard defines the universal as that which defines or shapes the individual, in this way.

The single individual is the individual who has his (purpose, end) in the universal.⁷⁰

In this definition Kierkegaard is suggesting a closed circuit different from the relationship of the self and self's own Other as discussed in the first chapter. It is a relationship between the individual and the universal defined by the universal that finds

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard. 55

its purpose and end in itself. It has no exterior unto itself, as it is everything. This definition is needed, as it is used to delineate the point of difference between the relationship of the individual to the universal, from the relationship between the individual to the absolute. For Kierkegaard in relation to the absolute the universal can have no relationship.

It is the universal as it has nothing outside of itself that is its (purpose, end). It is its own (purpose, end).⁷¹

To allow for the possibility of the absolute, the universal must be self-containing and the individual must exist within this understanding. It is from this position of knowledge that the possibility of not-knowledge is able. Acknowledgement of outside of the universal, Kierkegaard argues, is not possible as any acknowledgement or knowledge, which can only be known through articulation, returns to the universal. It is an argument Bernard Stiegler builds upon in his treatise, *Technics and Time*, in which he argues that the understanding of human has to be linked to the mechanics of recording or measuring such understanding.

The human? What is the human insofar as it was always already technicity and technical power.⁷²

In this argument Stiegler is highlighting the universality of articulation or communication. Any defining of self be it individual or universal, relies on the

⁷¹ Ibid. 56

⁷² Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans., Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Meridian (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998). 91

mechanics of the definition and these, for Stiegler, equate with the universal or common. These tools act as a democratising force creating a universality of the story of the individual. Echoes of this can also be seen within Lévinas and Blanchot and the defining of the self that was spoken about in the first chapter of this exegesis.

Kierkegaard further extends his definition of the universal.

The ethical is the universal as the universal it applies to everyone.⁷³

Kierkegaard draws a definition of the ethical, which he equates as the universal, from the story of Abraham and the request from God for the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, found in the book of Genesis. Within this story Abraham takes his son to Mount Moriah, with the intention of sacrificing him at the explicit command of God. To fulfil this action Abraham is required to make a journey of three days, during which he evades his son's questioning concerning the whereabouts of the animal to be sacrificed. Upon arrival at the appointed place Abraham builds an altar, binds his son and, at the point of plunging the knife into his chest, is stayed by a messenger of God who miraculously provides a ram as an alternative sacrifice.⁷⁴

It has to be remembered when addressing this story that Kierkegaard is defining the terms of individual and universal to lead to an argument that proposes an allowance for the actions of Abraham. Abraham's actions, Kierkegaard acknowledges, are outside his capacity to comprehend but he still attempts to create a reason allowing for them.

⁷³ Kierkegaard. 55

⁷⁴ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1973). Genesis 22: 1 - 14

Kierkegaard is using this story as a platform to question and find some point of understanding for his belief in the divine. Kierkegaard is spurred on to this task by his questioning of himself that asks how it is that he can hold belief while at the same time have such doubt? This story that he frames his questioning around is both the example of the belief that he sees himself not having and is a pivotal construction point of the belief he claims to have. After all, as a Christian, he claims to believe in the god of Abraham and Abraham is revered as one of the patriarchs of the Christian religion. This story provides a particular ethical quandary for Kierkegaard, which subsequently brings him to the brink of despair, to a state of anxiety and a place of questioning his belief.

For Kierkegaard the ethical within this story revolves around the intentionality of Abraham's actions. Through his laying out of the story he concludes that Abraham proceeded to a point where he committed to an action of sacrificing his son, which when perceived through the universal/ethical prism, was an act not of sacrifice, but of murder.

Kierkegaard argues this through the logic that says there was a binding required in Abraham's actions to uphold the relationship that Abraham had with God, an individual in relationship with the absolute. This relationship, Kierkegaard argues, places Abraham outside of the ethical responsibilities of the universal. In the direction given to Abraham from God, Abraham was not asked to believe or obey. He was asked to believe and obey with the belief step, or more accurately the faith, that is required in the action of belief, driving the obeying action. The request (to sacrifice his son) was not a request for an action for the sake of an action but rather a result that was derived from a position, as Kierkegaard argues, that was outside comprehension, as comprehension mediates through the universal. Abraham's son, Isaac, was the living

embodiment of the earlier promise from God for Abraham to be the father of nations.⁷⁵ Isaac was Abraham's only son through his wife. The sacrifice of Isaac would seemingly nullify the earlier promise, and logically placed Abraham in a position that contained the possibility of questioning the holiness and omnipotence of God, whom Abraham worshiped as the one true God.

To maintain his individual/absolute relationship that required unquestioning obedience, Abraham had to acquiesce to the command that God required with an action whose limitations did not allow articulation. It was a command that could only exist within the bounds of the individual and absolute relationship. For to articulate, either through firstly questioning (which would nullify the faith required of the individual/absolute relationship), or secondly through explanation or justification to himself, Isaac or others (to put into form and meaning through language), was to disavow the action of faith that was a requirement of the absolute relationship. A breach of this requirement (the act of articulation through questioning or justification, to his son, to his family or to anyone else) would re-enter Abraham into a position of mediation and return him wholly to the universal for "this position cannot be mediated as all mediation takes place only by the virtue of the universal".⁷⁶

To mediate, or bring into form as representation through language, would place him solely in the realm of the individual/universal relationship breaking the individual/absolute relationship. In committing to the individual/absolute relationship Abraham also had to understand, that in the eyes of his son (who could only know of Abraham's actions through the universality of the ethical), he would only ever be able

⁷⁵ Ibid. Genesis 15

⁷⁶ Kierkegaard. 66

to be seen as the perpetrator of an act of filicide. For while Isaac had a front row seat to this great action of faith that cemented Abraham's position as the father of the nation of Israel (to which all three major monotheistic modern religious belief systems have some claim), his position was only as one who encounters the representative action of this faith. He could only ever encounter it in the universal and so subject it to the ethical. Isaac could only experience his father as a murderer.

This is the point of crisis for Kierkegaard. Even though he attempts to approach Abraham's actions through the idea of faith outside of the logic or ethics of the individual/universal relationship. For,

If faith is taken away by becoming Nul and Nichts, all that remains is the brutal fact that Abraham meant to murder Isaac, which is easy enough for anyone to imitate if he does not have faith – that is, the faith that makes it difficult for him.⁷⁷

Kierkegaard arrives at a crisis around this point of intentionality, Abraham's commitment to the act of ending his son's life. It is a point of paradox. Being the individual having an absolute relationship with the absolute Abraham does make a move that separates him from the individual/universal. Instead of being the individual situated within the universal as ethics demands through faith he is raised to a position separate, above and incomprehensible to the universal. It is an ethical breach; in as far as ethics is understood through the universal/individual relationship that Abraham enacted. For the faith act to be enacted not only did he have to act without justification or question, but he had to commit to the action. Although as Kierkegaard makes point it

⁷⁷ Ibid. 30

is not a physical commitment (as the story unfolds without the death of Isaac) but a commitment of intention to the action. An action that is committed within his conscious or cognitive thinking, which, irrelevant of the final bodily movement, is actualised through the intention. Abraham enacted the giving of death to his son Isaac. Simultaneously as he enacted his role as the individual in relation to the absolute outside of the ethical, the action of faith that defines him as a patriarch and saint, he enacted his role as the individual in relation to the universal and is a murderer. There in lies the paradox of belief for Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard to truly look at Abraham, he argues, he can only know him as the murderer, as he can only encounter Abraham's action through the universality of representation.

Derrida expands on the point of paradox that Kierkegaard arrives at. He argues that the act of giving death, which Abraham was giving to Isaac,

[...] demands a temporality of the instant without ever constituting a present. If it can be said, it belongs to an atemporal temporality, to a duration that cannot be grasped: something that can neither stabilise, establish, grasp, apprehend, or comprehend. Understanding, common sense, cannot seize, conceive, understand, or mediate it; neither can they negate or deny it, implicate it in a work of negation, make it work: in the act of giving death, sacrifice suspends both the work of negation and work itself.⁷⁸

It is a point outside and beyond itself. It is a paradoxical location, which requires a simultaneous construction of a framework from which it can also be outside of and it is

⁷⁸ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*. 65

here, in this Derridaian “gift of death”,⁷⁹ that a potentialised position is opened. For Derrida the moment of committing to the death act simultaneously contains all the ethical that is implied in the individual/universal relationship, but it is only through this acknowledging act that the paradox can become possible, and without the paradox there is no faith.

The two duties must contradict one another, one must subordinate (incorporate, repress) the other. Abraham must assume absolute responsibility for sacrificing his son by sacrificing ethics, but in order for there to be a sacrifice, the ethical must retain all its value; the love for his son must remain intact, and the order of human duty must continue to insist on its rights.⁸⁰

Kierkegaard acknowledges this as a “step into the absurd”.⁸¹ It is this step through the act of faith, which is beyond. It can never be understood except through the barest of outlines. It can only be represented, speculated upon, talked around for the very nature of the faith act is outside of the communicable realm. As discussed above to attempt this communication through any means brings it back into the realms of the individual/universal and is no longer an action of faith. For it to be what it is proposing the action of faith has to be absurd.

The problem for Kierkegaard in encountering this paradox is that his encounter with the story of Abraham is as part of the individual/universal relationship. Within this story the self of Abraham occupies the position of singular individual or as defined in the last chapter, first viewer. In this position Abraham is privileged in his knowledge of the

⁷⁹ The idea of death is further discussed in the third chapter of this research

⁸⁰ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*. 66

⁸¹ Kierkegaard. 34

relationship between the individual and the absolute (which is only occupiable by the individual within the relationship), that circumvents the individual/universal relationship. Kierkegaard cannot be in the place of Abraham and therefore privileged to the individual/absolute relationship as it relates to this story and as such his only encounter can be through representation. Representation, which is housed in the universal. As such he has no understanding of Abraham's action of belief. His only comprehension with this relationship can be through fiction. As it is outside of his knowledge and encountered only through its representation it remains a speculative idea, comprehensible, as a sign, but indefinable and unattainable in the real. Through his fictive, imaginative, speculation Kierkegaard begins the construction of his own belief, mired deep in the doubt of unknowing.

It is this struggle with the unknowing stepping into the absurd that Kierkegaard recognises as a point of failure, measured against the perceived faith of Abraham, in relation to Kierkegaard's own desire for belief.

I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd; it is for me impossibility, but I do not praise myself for that.⁸²

This step into the absurd through the action of faith is counter to logic and yet it is the logical location for exploring the ideas that are inherent in this research's discussion. It is not necessarily a position of belief or a desire to impart such a position (which is so often linked to any discussion involving faith) that drives the questioning in this research, but rather it is a recognition that the arena of faith (as understood through

⁸² Ibid. 34

religious questioning) already contains the appropriate paradoxical reasoning that allows for the questions within this research to be found.

Faith is the paradox of the individual being higher than the universal. The single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute.⁸³

It is a paradox that is recognised through the process of the studio based research. One that draws a correlation between Kierkegaard's struggle with belief and the similar struggle that this research is exploring through art making.

Bruce Nauman, in his neon work of 1967,

The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths⁸⁴

and Sol LeWitt, with his opening stanza in his 1969 manifesto *Sentences on Conceptual Art*,

Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists, they leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid. 66

⁸⁴ Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)*, 1967, Bruce Nauman / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

⁸⁵ Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language* May, no. 1 (1969). 11

both articulate a reflection of this paradox as mediated through their thoughts on art and artist.

It is the recognition of the non-logic that aligns with the step into the absurd, outside of ethics, as defined by the universal/individual relationship, which correlates art, art making and faith. It is a step into the mystical that is suggested. While Nauman and LeWitt both articulate a path they do not reveal the inherent paradox of revealing such an idea, that of articulation, as discussed above. Once articulated - the way is closed. There is no mystical beyond; it cannot be accessed due to its return to the realm of the universal via language. If taken on face value they are suggesting a sort of shamanistic power (as an intermediary) is granted through the role of the artist. But when examined closely, this claim can only be a knowing falsehood, a tactical feint to suggest that there is a mystical unknown to know but one that cannot be mediated only suggested. Art or Conceptual Art, in LeWitt's case, can suggest a possibility without showing the way.

FAILURE WITHIN THE UNIVERSAL

Kierkegaard discusses at great length his self recognised failure to take the step into the absurd. A failure rooted, not in an ability to commit an action, but rather, in an inability to enact the action of faith. For Kierkegaard, to kill Isaac would be an act of resignation, not faith. Kierkegaard's knowledge of self is embedded in the self as defined against the universal. He is unable to be in the "duration that cannot be grasped"⁸⁶ for that location is paradoxical.

⁸⁶ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*. 65

Kierkegaard's recognition of the paradox, which he identifies through the actions of Abraham (and his failure to enter into it), leads him to the state that he identifies as "infinite resignation".⁸⁷

Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith.⁸⁸

It is a point that allows for a possibility or an inexpressible other. A potentialised state, known through the desire for belief or to believe but one that the dweller within the state of infinite resignation is resigned to not knowing, through an inability to step into the absurd.

This point of "infinite resignation"⁸⁹ as the place of acknowledged failure, enacted through communication, of the capability to believe (to step into the absurd and exit the universal), is where this research locates the *Today*, (ongoing), series by the artist On Kawara. The project is made up of a series of paintings of dates. The dates are predominantly rendered in white paint onto a black background,⁹⁰ in a basic sanserif font and in the language of the location in which they are painted. The exception to this is if the country does not use a Roman script. In this situation Esperanto is used. The date on the painting corresponds to the date on which the painting is made. If the painting is not completed in the 24 hours that correspond to that date then it is

⁸⁷ Kierkegaard. 46

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ There are some that are rendered onto red or blue backgrounds.

destroyed. The sizes of the paintings range from 8 x 10 inches to 61 x 89 inches. Each painting on completion is housed in a cardboard box specifically made to size. Initially, in the box, Kawara stored a cutting from a newspaper, from the country within which the work was made and of the same date as the painting but has ceased to do this in the latter part of the series.⁹¹

Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), paintings wallow in the moment of infinite resignation, as defined by Kierkegaard. They celebrate the individual/universal relationship, using the medium of time as the representation of the infinite universal, through which this relationship is defined. The individual, the viewer and subsequent idea of the artist as first viewer (signified through the newspaper articles in the first instance and then solely through the encounter through viewing in the later renderings of this work), is flattened by the monotony of time enacted upon and used as a conceptual tool to define the universality of viewing. As each painting declares itself as now, as self, it simultaneously consigns itself to then, as not singular but rather as part of the whole, as collective. Within the confines of the proposition Kawara allows no possibility for the individual to stand outside of the relationship defined by the relationship to the universal. Each and every individual is rendered subordinate to the commonality of the concept of time. Using Stiegler's definition of technic as the way of knowing of self, the action of painting (which is understood as being past), combined with the representation of time recorded through the marking (using language) of dates, produces a commonality that provides the structure for housing, from which the self of the individual is known, but only through the universal.

⁹¹ Jonathan Watkins, René Denizot, and On Kawara, *On Kawara*, Contemporary Artists. (London ; New York: Phaidon, 2002). 78

It is through this (self acknowledged), strictness of the confines applied to the *Today*, (ongoing), series that this research is suggesting a correlation of Kierkegaard's infinite resignation and subsequently the outline of what it is not, can be also suggested. Kawara draws out the allegory of time and its infiniteness through the stringent productive techniques that he imposes, the use of a standard measure of approximately eight hours within a 24 hours cycle to make the work, and through the ongoing repetitive gesture contained within the project as a whole. The articulation in the individual paintings of a time unit (eight hours, one day), which is immediately relatable as a measure to the viewer's lived experience,⁹² acts as a compounding element within the conceptual premise of work. The finiteness of the individual understood against the infiniteness of the universal as represented through time. The repetition trumpets the failure found within limitation (in this instance the limitation of the self of the artist), and indeed the limitation and subsequent failure of the viewer through the encounter, to be here and now and to also be outside of here and now which is there and then.

It is an articulated position of stasis. The longer the series goes on the louder the failure within it is. As each moment is grasped and pinned down through the laborious painting process it eludes it's proposed conceptually fixed state. "I am here" is only ever "I was here" which is again only "I am still here but not there". This is a position recognised by Lévinas when he argues,

⁹² At least in the majority of post industrial societies.

The fact that humanity could have provided itself with art reveals in time the uncertainty of time's continuation and something like a death doubling the impulses of life.⁹³

Lévinas is arguing that through the awareness of death an understanding of the finiteness of life is known. By proposing a limit, an awareness of humanity, of universality, of commonality, is imbedded through mortality.

The parallels between Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), series and the photographic (as formed through camera recording devices, including scanners, phones, etc), are also strong when viewed through this articulation of the idea of time as a reflection of what is and what was and what can be no more. The mechanics of the camera were initially designed as a recording device. The camera enabled a recording of something that occurred in front of its lens. This created a representation of the 'something'. A 'something', once removed from the time stream and held aloft to allow for a scrutiny and a way of being seen that is not how this 'something' would have been encountered in real time, is made possible.⁹⁴ This action of removal via a pausing that never continues is what alerts to the universal of the construct of time, as a thing, a commonality, which binds humanity through temporality, but also suggests an infinite.

In April of 2010 this research was in a place of dysfunction. It had lost momentum and on the days that had been set aside as studio days any number of the following things

⁹³ Lévinas. 140

⁹⁴ The onset of digital technology and digital production and postproduction has largely rendered this understanding of the photographic process as mute but the traditional interpretation of the medium conceptually articulates a point that is being engaged with here. It is also the recognised main methodological process identified through the studio component of this research.

would take place: a visit to the local coffee shop, reading of comic books at the library near the coffee shop, a cruise of the internet looking for interesting YouTube clips or movie previews or torrent sites that had things to be downloaded. A lot of evening television of an indeterminate worth was watched. While some of these activities created a feeling of general enjoyment after a number of weeks these acts of procrastination began to grate and a state of anxiety and doubt, with regards to achieving the research outcomes (or indeed the worth of this research), was entered.

With this anxiety acting as a backdrop (and an impetus) it was decided that, like the proverbial ship, some movement was needed to allow for steerage to a port of interest. The simplest course seemed to be to use the state of aporia that had marooned this research as a tool to reignite it and so a tabulation system of how each day was spent was started. Each day was divided into twenty-four one-hour blocks. Each hour was recorded as either Used or Wasted. The guiding principles for the classification of an hour Used or Wasted were completely subjective, dependent upon the vagrancies of a general feeling of 'how the day went' at the time of recording. Six hours of everyday were classified as Used to account for the amount of rest needed to physically function to the capacity that allowed the completion of daily activities, dependant, of course, upon six hours worth of rest being actually taken. The other hours existed in one form, as lived, and then were subjected to a transformation into a categorical value. This project was titled *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing).

In each of the three exhibition iterations of this project that have currently taken place, the markings originally recorded within a small diary, were transferred onto a larger material. In two cases, *Delineation*, (2010), at RMIT Project Space and *This is before that*, (2011), at Sarah Scout, this was a single and then series of silk cut prints 28cm x 38cm in size. In the third *Used hours/Wasted hours/Reclaimed hours, January*,

(*watermelon*), (2011), at White Street Project Space, this was a series of prints onto polypropylene, 210cm x 140cm. *Delineation*, (2010), and *Used hours/Wasted hours/Reclaimed hours, January*, (*watermelon*), (2011), each depicted ones months worth of hours while the work that was part of *This is before that*, (2011), depicted fourteen months worth (the number of months from the point of the first recording until the month of the exhibition), with each print depicting one month. In each version the count of hours was represented as a series of four downstrokes with a fifth cross stroke to indicate a group of five. It is a way of indicating a count commonly seen in representations of someone marking time within a confined situation (such as prison), in film and illustrated media. The marks were made in white against a pastel coloured background. The colour and the month were then represented in the title, as exemplified by *Used hours/Wasted hours, January*, (*watermelon*).

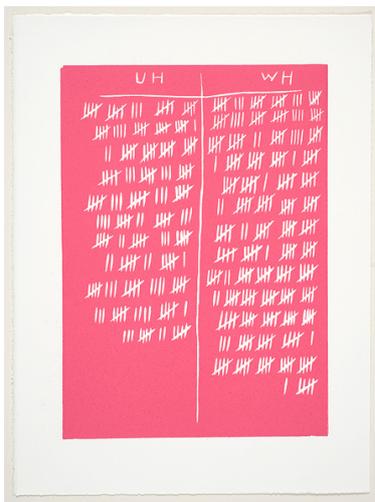


Figure 4. Kiron Robinson, *Used hours/Wasted hours, February, (bubblegum)*, 2011.



Figure 5. Kiron Robinson, *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (installation view), 2011, Sarah Scout, Melbourne.

Used hours/Wasted hours, (ongoing), forefronts the idea of time as one of its primary materials within its conception. It is through this representation of time and alignment of value that *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), can also enter the arena of Kierkegaard's infinite resignation. As with Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), series *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), (through the use of the idea of time), creates a type of

portrait. Not a portrait that is traditionally found within the genre called Portraiture (which forefronts the singularity of the subject), but rather, a portrait rooted in commonality;⁹⁵ commonality, as outlined by Kierkegaard, of the individual as defined and housed by the universal.

Man created time. Time is a fiction. Do you understand? Man created time measurements so he could know what (*sic*) time it was(*sic*). There is nothing out there...that says time actually exists as a universal truth. A human being is a part of the whole, called by us a “universe”, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest: A kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.

There is no time?

No there is time, it's 11 o'clock. There is time, it's just a fiction.⁹⁶

This is a conversation between a fictionalised Albert Einstein and Christian Walker, the hero of the *Powers* graphic novel series. Fictional Einstein is highlighting the subjectiveness of the representation of the universality of time as a *lived* experience. It is a medium for defining the universality of the individual and indeed articulates Stiegler's argument with regard to technic.

⁹⁵ Time in this instance is the binder in the commonality. While the recording and perception of time is subjective there is still a communal understanding of the idea of time that is no more, or the passing of a time. The ideas of past and future, which are known through the lived experience, form the framework of what is being labelled as time here. It is this understanding, in this *that is no longer*, or *that which was*, that is being labelled as the common.

⁹⁶ Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Avon Oeming, *Powers : The Definitive Hardcover Collection*, vol. 3 (New York: Marvel Publishing, 2005). 307

It is through this commonality (this relationship of the individual as known through the universal), whose purpose is and of itself, that the position for being *outside of* becomes potentialised. Why? Because (like with Kierkegaard's approach to the absolute), it acts as a structure that defines itself. And through this housing, stakes out a position of inclusiveness that implies all in an understanding of the universal, which allows for a potentiality of what it does not contain and is also subsequently created; all that is not-known.

Tehching Hsieh emphasises this in his durational performative work, particularly in his *One Year Performance, 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*, (1980-81), in which Hsieh punched into a time clock every hour of everyday for one year. Accompanying this action Hsieh also took a photograph of himself at every punch in. Like Kawara, Hsieh, while having multiple conceptual streams readable within his work, forefronts the idea of time as a commonality that articulates the individual within it and defined by it. This work emphasises the relationship to time as a form of measurement from which a value of commodity in relation to labour is given. Similarly in Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), series and in *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), there is an articulation of perceived value, the subjectiveness of which highlights the fictionalisation of time as measure. Within a capitalist system it is a relatable concept, as is the pain of being woken up in the night or general sleeplessness. Hsieh's work requires a commonality between his action and the viewer interacting with the representation of that action. It is through this representation, which overtly signifies a universal lived state, which re-emphasises the entirety of the universal, but also simultaneously tugs at the strings of doubt to undo this rigid suggested state. As with Kawara, Hsieh highlights the failure of the individual to enter the paradox of a relationship with the absolute of the infinite. Rather he can only reflect the inability to communicate this. As each image is taken, as each moment

is measured and accounted for, all that it is not is suggested or potentialised, but not entered into. In suggesting the infinite *that is everything that is all time* Hsieh also suggests the infinite *that is nothing that is no time*.

As each moment, photograph, day, is marked and recorded it is able to be scrutinised but it is only the representation that is scrutinised. As discussed in the first chapter, in the encountering through representation a distancing is formed. A distance which alerts to the Other, in this case the communal Other recognised by the material of time signalled in the representations. Much like the idea of time itself; an implication of movement, but like Zeno's arrow, without any. This means each moment folds to the next, which is again the present, the now as well as its past. It is only ever a present of encounter, though, not the present of the represented whether through Kawara's painting, Hsieh's photographs and time cards or *Used Hours/Wasted hours, (ongoing)*, hour marks.

This is what has dwelled in the impossibility of objectively describing and measuring it. In fact, the need to measure and weigh that give rise to one of our most fundamental conventions, endorsed by the authority of the academies, seems to have become a universal instrument. As if the abundance and precision of the measurements of distance, weight and time, dimensions and dates, calibres, proportions, equivalences, patterns and methods has dispelled the need for poetics of perception.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Bartomeu Mari, "Invisible Tools," in *Autofocus Retina*, ed. Lothar Baumgarten and Museu d'Art Contemporani(Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2008). 7

In articulating an idea of the finite (time), these series implicate the potential of the anxiety inducing infinite. In these works discussed so far the adherence to such a tight system of measurement allows the suggestion of *the mystic* that Nauman (building on the lineage of Duchamp through his readymades), was referring. In declaring the universality of the material of time, passing it through the prism of art and representation, the initial representative qualities of the material are rendered open for examination. That confrontation with the paradoxical idea that cannot be understood except through an understanding of what is not. It is in the stasis that is created through this implication that an outline of what is not may be conceived. Not in any fullness but in the half shadow, in the paradox.

The disturbing and really objectionable thing about paradoxes is that they make us suspect that the absurd is possible, that there is an ultimate paradox which no one can solve.⁹⁸

Kawara's and Hsieh's work is a reflection of the anxiety of the paradox of knowledge of what it is that is not known. It holds an anxiousness because it is unable to enter the arena of the absurd. It is an anxiety that the work *Don't forget me (forever)*, (ongoing) reflects.

The open-ended series *Don't forget me (forever)*, (ongoing), started in 2010 with two similar works cast from silver foil letter balloons. The first work, *All the numbers in the universe, (Don't forget me)*, (2010), was cast in Hydro-stone and coated in black acrylic car paint. It is of variable dimension but each letter is no higher than 15cm. The second

⁹⁸ Peter Nilson, "A Labyrinth in Which We Are All Lost: Some Thoughts on Time and the Universe.," in *On Kawara: Continuity/Discontinuity*, ed. Bjorn Springfeldt (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1980). 13

work, *Heavy Burden*, (*Don't forget me bronze*), (2010), made at the same time was cast in bronze and finished with a plated chrome coat, again the dimensions are variable but with no letter higher than 15cm. Both works spell the phrase "DON'T FORGET ME". The literal weight of both these works re-emphasising the conceptual conceit of ultimately being forgotten no matter what physicality is employed or impressed.



Figure 6. Kiron Robinson, *All the numbers in the universe*, (*Don't forget me*), 2010.



Figure 7. Kiron Robinson, *Heavy Burden*, (*Don't forget me bronze*), 2010.

These works were followed by a video work first displayed in the night projection gallery at the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Melbourne. Taking the form of a screensaver (albeit a somewhat hokey one), *Still counting*, (*Don't forget me again*), (2010), was a 4:3 projection that played from 6 pm until 6 am the following day.

The projection consists of the multiple variances of the words Don't, Forget and Me flashing, sliding, bouncing, appearing, disappearing around the screen. The words appear in a variety of pastel colours as well as white. Using the language of the screensaver, which functions as a time or visual space filler until the keyboard is activated to clear the screen, *Still counting*, (*Don't forget me again*), (2010), plays at waiting as though anticipating its disintegration for something better, more serious. It is a position of waiting that is re-emphasised by its location (in its first instance at the CCP) of display. Only being viewable from outside of the gallery and only turning on

when the gallery closed it disappeared when the more serious work of the gallery was activated the next day.



Figure 8. Kiron Robinson, *Still counting, (Don't forget me again)*, 2010.

At the point of writing there also existed within this series a neon version, *Painted Neon (More Don't forget me)*, (2010), exhibited first at the Melbourne Art Fair, a T-shirt version, *Hi Fashion, (Stylish Don't forget me)*, (2010) and a larger balloon work, *Floating (Don't forget me)*, (2010). In each of these instances the material manifestation slightly re-emphasises the forth-coming action of being forgotten, whether it be through the passing of trends in fashion, the temporality of advertising or the literalness of floating away on a breeze.

In his writing about the Contemporary, Boris Groys refers to a relationship to time that is not necessarily purposed through its presentness.

[...] to be con-temporary does not necessarily mean to be present, to be here-and-now; it means to be “with time” rather than “in time.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Boris Groys, *Going Public*, ed. Brian Kuan Wood Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle, E-Flux Journal Books (Berlin ; New York: Sternberg Press, 2010). 94

Groys uses the illustration of Francis Alys' animation and drawing, *Songs for Lupita*, (1998), to expand the understanding of 'with time' space rather than the 'in time' space. In *Songs for Lupita*, (1998), a female figure pours a glass of water from one glass to another and back again while a song with the words "Mañana, mañana" (tomorrow, tomorrow) is sung in the background. It is an action of "doing without doing".¹⁰⁰ The gesture is without productive meaning. It is removed of any *use value* outside of the use value of the action itself. It is only purposeful in that it allows for its own action to be and this equates for Groys' as being "with time" rather than "in time".¹⁰¹

For Alys this is a concept that reoccurs in various manifestations within his work. *Paradox of Praxis I: Sometimes making something leads to nothing*, (1997), a five minute video resulting from a 7 hour performance in which Alys pushes a block of ice around the streets of Mexico City until the ice completely melts, for instance. The action when considered within Groys' definition of the contemporary literally ends up with no resulting use value except as a recording of an action enacted to enable a recording of the action. The effort of moving a block of ice around the streets of Mexico City results in a dematerialisation of an object. It has no purpose outside of the resulted melting. Even the labour of pushing and walking for an extended period of time is truncated and denied in the representation of the labour, the video that is reduced to an easy five minutes.

¹⁰⁰ Francis Alys, "Francis Alys a Story of Deception", Tate Modern <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/francisalys/roomguide12.shtml> (accessed 20 November 2011).

¹⁰¹ Groys, *Going Public*. 94

It is this logic which is in play within the work *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), and *Don't forget me*, (ongoing). In *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), recordings are made of an increment that's only use value is to articulate the recording and the value that is given through being recorded. Like Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), series an implication of time as a movement is suggested through a repetitive action of marking onto a silkcut lino plate. It is applied with ink and through the submission of force within a press, is transferred onto paper. Once the measure is subjected to this process though, the ontological differences that suggested an original purpose of being (to be wasted or to be used), are rendered redundant and instead a new ontology of use is established as a marker of itself; a waiting present. Its indexical implication of the conceptual process of its formation is flattened (as though by the press through which it passes through), and transferred to the indexical of its material formation. By being literally made flat the index of the action of formation is pushed into the realm of the representation which denies or reduces the process to illustration of itself.

Don't forget me, (ongoing), on the other hand suggests a waiting present defined by its impeding removal from time. As opposed to the hopeless action of grasping on to a here and now, *Don't forget me*, (ongoing), anticipates a future from which its presentness (known through its relation to having a past), is not present, through the action of being forgotten. It anticipates its own failure to be present. Being removed from time by this involuntary action. Becoming non-being. As with Kawara's *Today*, (ongoing), series, *Don't forget me*, (ongoing), is articulating a stasis which is bound in its inevitability of non-being, and like Alÿs, serves only to mark itself as a marker for itself.

[...] art therefore freezes time within images doubles and immobilizes being:
characters suffer an eternal anxiety imprisoned in an inhuman interval.¹⁰²

Both *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), and *Don't forget me*, (ongoing), use doubling as a form of reiteration or reinforcement to allow for an articulation of difference from self which implies the self found through the communal. Rosalind Kraus (referring to Roman Jakobson's work on sound systems within linguistics) explains the symbiotic relationship that reiterates through doubling in giving meaning through relationship and also in forming separateness;

His answer, we remember, is that the infant will notice that, by doubling a given sound (mama, papa, etc), he or she can retroactively mark the first sound as signifier and thus a bearer of meaning. But this marker not only marks and thus redefines the first phoneme; it also marks the space between phoneme and itself, adding to its mark the same of the diacritical space of differentially. The logic of the re-mark is, then, that in marking a mirror-object as the same as itself, it simultaneously marks itself as different, or to go to the next step, as self-different.¹⁰³

In the same way in both *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), and *Don't forget me*, (ongoing), this doubling or repetition is used to simultaneously suggest a separateness and individuality, but one found through the universality. In *Don't forget me*, (ongoing), the doubling is found through the repetition of the phrase. Within *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), the initial doubling occurs through the assignment of a value, as

¹⁰² Lévinas. 129

¹⁰³ Rosalind Krauss, "Some Rotten Shoots from the Seeds of Time," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Okwui Enwezor Terry Smith, Nancy Condee (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008). 69

wasted or used. An hour suggests a differentiation against another hour which is a position of difference or self-difference. The redoubling occurs through the embedding value or valuelessness gained in the move away from a measure of time and into a representation of a measure of time which occurs through the art making process. Because it is no longer time that is present here. It is the representation of time as measured and mediated through the viewing experience.

What makes us feel is not the actual thing, but a mediated, secondary representation of the event.¹⁰⁴

And through this mediation, the tacit acknowledgement of the failure to present, to only re-present, that the possibility opens for a beyond to be potentialised. For like Kawara *Today*, (ongoing), series, *Used hours/Wasted hours*, (ongoing), and *Don't forget me*, (ongoing), wallow in the position of "infinite resignation"¹⁰⁵ and, as Kierkegaard suggests, it is in knowing of this position of infinite resignation (knowing the limits of the universal and recognising the bearing that this has upon any understanding of self) that the potential for the absurdity of faith can be opened.

It is in this position that the representation of the suggestion of time is able to potentialise an idea of the outline of an absolute through what it is not. As Kierkegaard recognises in his reflections of the Abraham story, it is through recognition of the individual, understood through the universal, that a position outside of articulation can exist. A relationship between the individual to the absolute, but it is mute, it is silent, it is

¹⁰⁴ Pablo Lafuente, "Follow This, You Bitches," *Parkett* 87 (2010). 134

¹⁰⁵ Kierkegaard. 46

not-knowable. Kierkegaard recognises this space of silence of not-knowledge in the Abraham story and he recognises his not-knowing of it.

POTENTIAL BEYOND

For if this is what time is, it is nothing that I see from without....So time is myself; I am the duration I grasp, and time is duration grasped in me. And from now on we are at the absolute. A strange absolute knowledge since we know neither all our memories nor even the whole thickness of our present, and since my contact with myself is “partial coincidence” (to use a term often used by Bergson which, to tell the truth, is a problematic one.) in any case, when my self is at issue the contact is absolute because it is partial. I know my duration as no one else does because I am caught up in it; because it overflows me. I have an experience of it which could not be more narrowly or closely conceived of. Absolute knowledge is not detachment; it is inherence.¹⁰⁶

In acknowledging the failure that forms faith, of declaring a position that is so dependent upon an articulation by the individual/universal relationship (which reinforces the limitations and the means to which these limitations are created and known), that an *outside of it* can be potentialised. A beyond is suggested and is always present in its potential, an absolute that resides in the paradox of declarative and denial.

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans., Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1964). 183-85

CHAPTER 3 – THE ABSOLUTE

The fact that the writer's task ends with his life hides another fact: that, through this task, his life slides into the distress of the infinite.¹⁰⁷

And so this research comes to the absolute. This is the third part of the structure outlined by Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard this idea of the absolute corresponded to his understanding of God. God, whom he understood as a being or state beyond question, but paradoxically knowable only through the questioning process. As outlined in the introduction Kierkegaard's absolute is being addressed as an equivalent to the point of 'beyond articulation' that this research is interested in.

Within the second chapter the paradox of faith as identified by Kierkegaard was considered in relation to the universal. It specifically addressed the universal's agency in delineating an understanding of the communal nature of the individual through the enclosed nature of this relationship. This was explored through the finite and the infinite suggested within this relationship. This research argued that through the formation of such a closed position a potentialised outside is also formed. It is formed through limit that defines the known of the individual/universal relationship that allows for a not-knowing. It is a position argued as the relationship between the individual and the absolute, but it is a relationship that is a paradox, as it can only be addressed through the terms of universal and as such remains in the state of not-known.

¹⁰⁷Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*.p 26

This third chapter continues on from this point and seeks to address the proposition of this research through the absolute. Ideas that have been identified through the paradox of belief, the anxious state, the precarious, limit, the encounter, distancing, language, and representation will be revisited through this prism of the absolute.

This chapter is not a look directly at the absolute (because, as argued in the second chapter, that cannot be) but rather a building upon the ideas and definitions that have been discussed up to this point. Within the first two chapters of this exegesis it has been suggested that a possibility of a position of simultaneity is potentialised through the individual and the universal states. This will be expanded upon within this chapter as a key concept for the formation of a potential questioning position from which an understanding or an outline of that which is beyond articulation can be addressed.

Simultaneity within this chapter is explored as both a material strategy that is manifested within the studio based outcomes of this research and a strategy for constructing a conceptual approach. This questioning alerts to an outline for what-is-not, for the not-known, for that which is outside of articulation. It is a strategy argued through the writings of George Didi-Huberman, Maurice Blanchot and Jaques Derrida, and through the work of Lothar Baumgarten, Jorgen Leth, Nedko Solakov, Richard Prince and Charline Von Heyl.

Death is proposed as a model of an absolute and explored in relation to the individual.

Three major outcomes are addressed in relation to the ideas explored within this chapter. These outcomes, *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011) and within this, the work which forms *I Ham*, (2012), *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, (2012) and the ongoing project

loosely titled *All the names in the world*, (Sale), (ongoing), propose a precarious position, both materially and conceptually, that search for paradoxical encounters. These outcomes are addressed as material parallels through which Kierkegaard's conceptual model of belief is discussed.

Through a material state of anxiety, opened up by the studio based research outcomes, the precarious materials of doubt and faith, through continual failure, are brought into being. The strategies of defining and cohabitating binary positions allow for the not-known to be potentialised and it is here, in the not-known that this research (while acknowledging this inherent impossibility); seeks to be. Doubt enables faith while defying it and faith is built upon the foundation of doubt, an unstable, fraught position that balances its surety upon its simultaneous erosion.

Language again is discussed, language not just as spoken or written text but also as a broader tool intrinsic in the act of communication and representation, as a signifier of the possibility of communication and also non-communication. Language (in its broadest sense), and the tools that are used to enact it, are intrinsic in this discussion for an understanding of limit in relation to representation. Through the discussion of language the representative action is again also discussed, as this is the intrinsic problem with regards to the absolute. It can only be talked about through representation. As argued with regards to the universal it is this act that subjects any knowing back into the realm of the universal. Yet it is also this tool, this imperfect construct that has to be used to have this discussion. This is why the oblique approach is the only one possible; why the only position to address the absolute is from a point of question.

DEATH

No one is sure of dying. No one doubts death, but no one can think of a certain death except doubtfully. For to think of death is to introduce into thought the supremely doubtful, the brittleness of the unsure. It is as if in order to think authentically upon the certainty of death, we had to let thought sink into doubt and inauthenticity, or yet again as if when we strive to think on death, more than our brain – the very substance and truth of thought itself – were bound to crumble.¹⁰⁸

Within this chapter the absolute is represented through the idea of death. Death is a paradoxical binary, a known unknown, an awareness of which allows for definition against. It is in this position of being against that *push back* can be achieved. Pushing back is the defining against; coming to a definition of *what is* by *what is not*. This process of defining by *what is not* is important to the potential articulation (or non-articulation) that is present within this research.

Death or non-being (the removal from the real) as a position is already introduced into any work of art, especially that which is photographic in material or conception.¹⁰⁹ Death implies a position of being to which there can be a cessation of. Death alerts to the limit of being. Death is a potential reflection of the individual/absolute relationship. As implied by Blanchot's statement that heads this chapter, it is only knowable from the position of the individual in relation to death as an absolute. Any other knowing is mediated through the representative action.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 95

¹⁰⁹ For further discussion on this please see Chapter 1 and 2. Particularly discussion around Emmanuel Lévinas and the self and Other and the role of the work of art within this relationship.

This research is not so much interested in an understanding of death implied in the biological, organic sense, but a conceptual positioning of death as not-being. A conceptual conceit that requires an approach that is housed in, as Blanchot states, the “supremely doubtful”¹¹⁰ but it is through “doubt and inauthenticity”¹¹¹ that that which is beyond articulation can be approached. As has been discussed in earlier chapters in this research, a process of paradoxical reasoning has been applied as a strategy within the outcomes articulated by this project. This process requires a push back position. That is a position that allows for a reverse articulation, or an articulation of something by what it is not. This research cannot be definitive, the area within which it seeks to house itself can only be approached obliquely, through suggestion or the forming of boundaries, which imply rather than define.

Death is, in and of itself, an unknown, a ceasing to be what is known. An idea of an end of being that exists in the form of the concept to create the edge (or the wall) upon which the potential for that which is not perceived as the end can be defined. The end implies a non-end, another locus, which is a locus of being. Why? Because it is an end of being that is implied in the idea of end, an end of being as is.

For the first time, she raised the words “give oneself” to their true meaning: she gave Anne, she gave much more than the life of Anne, she gave the ultimate gift, the death of Anne; she separated herself from the terribly strong feeling of being Anne, from the terrible anguished feeling of being Anne threatened with

¹¹⁰ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*. 95

¹¹¹ Ibid.

dying, and changed it into the yet more anguished feeling of being no longer
Anne [...] ¹¹²

In this passage from Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure*, the character of Anne has her passage into non-being described. It is a passage that requires the action of simultaneously being and not-being. Similarly to Lévinas' discussion on the self and Other in the first chapter of this exegesis, Blanchot is suggesting of knowing of self through self's own Other. Whereas Lévinas allows for a knowing of the self as Other, Blanchot propositions that through the encounter with the absolute of death there is a possibility of knowing the self as other and a knowing of the state that Lévinas identifies as a "real". ¹¹³ It is a passage that is never resolved but held in flux between these two positions through the dependency of each other for their own self. It can only be a partial knowing of each, a knowing of each as Other and as self. It is a singularity made up of two separates. It is a precarious position that Blanchot describes here.

Timothy Clark, in discussing Blanchot's work, describes this precariousness as, "death as the possibility of the impossibility of existing". ¹¹⁴ A position defined through a doubling of the negative. Not a position of not existing but a position or possibility of the impossibility of existing, it is only a possibility, not a probability and most definitely not a certainty.

In the same way the work of art can, through the ontological question raised in the act of representation, engage in what it is not by what it is. What does the work of art

¹¹² Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, trans., Robert Lambertson (New York: Station Hills Press, 1988). 82

¹¹³ Lévinas. 132

¹¹⁴ Timothy Clark, "Contradictory Passion: Inspiration in Blanchot's "The Space of Literature", *SubStance* 25, No 1, no. 79 (1996). 52

represent if not its own end or limitation? In articulating its self via its limitation it also articulates an outline of what is not it, a negative, a lack, a failure of representation.

However, the work – the work of art, the literary work – is neither finished nor unfinished: it is. What it says is exclusively this: that it is – and nothing more.¹¹⁵

Blanchot is intimating here the act of representation. The work of art can only be such while being itself. It is a similarity that Derrida, in discussing death, describes as the “work of mourning”.¹¹⁶

True mourning has nothing to do with the “work of mourning”: the “work of mourning” an elaboration concerned with keeping at a distance the incorporation of the dead, it is very much the work of philosophy; it is very much the work of representation. In the end, the dead will be represented, thus held at bay.¹¹⁷

Through the action of representation the work of art states its position and it manifests its not-position, or in Derridaian language, the action of “holding at bay”.¹¹⁸ The harder or more definitive the action of declaring what it is, the louder the accompanying declaration of what it is not. In declaring through this act of representation what it is, itself, it holds fast to what it keeps at bay, its not-self.

¹¹⁵ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*. 22

¹¹⁶ Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*. 52

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 52

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

I tried. There. Reality, (2011), was an installation work. In its initial iteration it was installed in an L shaped room, although the L would be quite chubby, with a wide stem and a stubby base. The door to the room was located in the corner at the point of conjunction between the two strokes of the L. In this iteration it consisted of three flat screen television monitors hanging in a row along the right hand wall; the base of the L. Each monitor contained a single word that flashed on and off. The words on the monitors in order appeared as *Believe*, *Please* and *Believe* in Handwriting – Dakota font. The words were a pink/purple colour with an apple green outline. The words flashed independently of each other creating a random fluid order; *Believe*, *Believe*, *Please*, *Please*, *Believe*, *Please*, *Believe*, *Please*, etc.

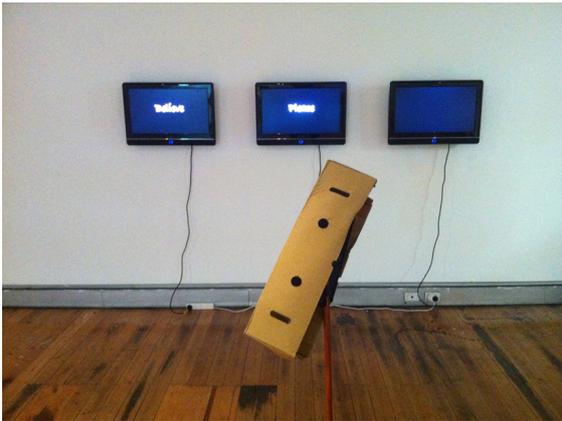


Figure 9. Kiron Robinson, *I tried. There. Reality*, (installation view), 2011.



Figure 10. Kiron Robinson, *I tried. There. Reality*, (installation view), 2011.

Placed directly in front of the gallery door was one of a series of five fruit boxes. The other four were scattered around the room. The boxes were perched atop of a variety of domestic stick-like implements; rake, broom, mop, broom handle. The boxes all had small holes in their sides that carried the appearance of eyes or mouths, anthropomorphising the box/stick set up. These holes had the appearance of gazing or gaping (depending on whether they acted as eyes or mouth) upwards. One box directly sat on the floor, decapitated from its perch. The poles upon which the boxes were perched were inserted into the floor, or supported in a way that suggested such.

On the floor, wedged into a corner of the upper apex of the two strokes of the L, lay another flat screen monitor. On this monitor was an image of a baby pigeon inside a fruit box. Alongside the pigeon, inside the box, were evidences of some sort of food and bird faeces. The image was shot directly from above giving the pigeon the appearance of cowering into a corner of its box (which had been converted through the screening process to double as the corner of the monitor), as if trying to hide from an overhead threat. The image was a short, 6 to 7 second segment, played forward, reversed and looped, to give a feeling of a continuous, never-ending flow, in forward running time. Leaving the baby pigeon forever in the action of huddling away from any and every viewer, present or otherwise.



Figure 11. Kiron Robinson, *Untitled*, (from I tried. There. Reality. installation view), 2011

To the left, at what could be considered the top of the L, on two adjoining walls hung a neon text work and a photograph. The neon work spelt the words **many worries** in Bauhaus 93 font. The neon was designed so that the word **many** sat on top of the word **worries**, the **m** flashed on and off in (approximately) a two second interval, allowing the word **many** to be read as **any** or **many** depending on the point of intersection between the viewer and the flash cycle.

The photograph on the adjacent wall (81cm x 81cm in size) was pinned to the wall using black topped sewing pins. The image contained the same group of boxes that were presented in the gallery, with three extra companions, assembled this time in a much closer half circle underneath a Hills Hoist clothes line. The clothesline was located in what, to all intents and purposes, appeared to be a suburban backyard. Within the photograph the boxes occupied the lower half of the image, with the arms of the Hills Hoist forming a line along the top of the yard's fences, splitting the image into a neat half. The top half of the image contained trees, reaching out from neighbouring yards, and the sky. The image was constructed in such a way that the boxes' 'eyes' and 'mouths' appeared to be looking upwards, outside of the top frame of the image.



Figure 12. Kiron Robinson, *Any worries/Many worries*, 2011



Figure 13. Kiron Robinson, *Boxhead*, 2011

The various voices (within the installation brought to work by its component parts) manifested a switching of emphasis as each part was read in relation to another. The potential for a focused singularity was suggested but simultaneously undercut. Framed within a series of binary possibilities, each worked to suggest themselves as their own Other while trying to declare their own singularity as self. In the end it was a space of

representation that was suggested; representation that was doubly suggested through the symbolic nature of the work. What is symbolised, though, takes a secondary position to the action of symbolising. It acts as a foil to allow the action to contest and rebound off and against the other symbolising forms within the installation without creating a cohesive whole. It is a statement of one to and against another. The activation of the distinct binaries at play within this, which is the language of semiotics, allows for an approach to the liminal; the threshold of the binary between presence and absence known through the encounter.

For after all in *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011), this is what is being suggested- The symbology at play: the suburban dream, cold war nuclear hostilities, look to the sky, the real, the representation of the real, the real representation, all point towards a threshold. It is at the threshold that this work seeks to be. It is a threshold, similarly as discussed in relation to the individual in the first chapter, which cannot be looked over.

There is however, an alternative to this incomplete semiology. It is based on the general hypothesis that the efficacy of these images is not due solely to the transmission of knowledge – visible, legible, or invisible – but that, on the contrary, their efficacy operates constantly in the intertwinings, even the imbroglio, of transmitted and dismantled knowledges, of produced and transformed not-knowledges.¹¹⁹

And here is the work of *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), it provides an incomplete semiology, a series of strong suggestions, which do not ever truly gain a singular voice.

¹¹⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images : Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans., John Goodman (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). 16

The parts that form the greater whole, undercut, at each potential singular, symbolic voice, to allow for an operating in the intertwinings or imbroglio.

A similarity can be found in the painting practice of Charline Von Heyl's, which enacts this paradox of the mythological, where version, sign, referent, and content constantly collapse, revise, reshape, unfold, and contradict each other.¹²⁰ Von Heyl uses symbols and signs but sets them loose from their referential context. Her paintings within the language of abstraction use this same language to hold this clear-cut definition at bay, backgrounds seep through foregrounds, formalist gridding collapses into abstract gestures. The works operate in an internalised contradictory fashion. It is a dichotomy through simultaneousness that *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), also seeks to be.

No sooner have you grabbed a hold of it than myth opens out into a fan of a thousand segments. Here the variant is origin. Everything that happens, happens this way, or that way, or this other way. And in each of these diverging stories all the others are reflected, all brush by us like folds of the same cloth.¹²¹

Georges Didi-Huberman in his writing on the work *The Anunciation*, by Fra Angelica (a painted fresco from around 1440-41 found in the Monastery of San Marco, cell 3, Florence), suggests that in this work there is a double reception made possible: one through the transmission of knowledge. This is understood in a conventional manner through a conventional questioning process. *What is on the wall? What is present? What is known of the context of the work and the artist?* and a myriad of other similar

¹²⁰ Mary Simpson, "Now or Else," *Parkett* 89 (2011). 52

¹²¹ Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (New York: Knopf, 1993). 136

questions are all used to gather detail that can be pieced together to form the knowledge that is transmitted to the viewer.¹²² The second is much more complex and resides in what Didi-Huberman terms the “production of not-knowledge.”¹²³ It is a not-knowledge that is produced through acceptance of the binary functioning as a whole, not as one over or before the other, but a simultaneous action.

[...] in no case is it a matter of replacing the tyranny of thesis with that of antithesis. It's a matter of proceeding dialectically: of thinking the thesis *with* its antithesis, the architecture with its flaws, the rule with its transgression, the discourse with its slips of the tongue, the function with its dysfunction, and the fabric with its rend [...]¹²⁴

It is a similar process of understanding that Lygia Clarke articulates through what she termed the organic line. The line that “[...] has not been drafted or carved by anyone, but results from contact of two different surfaces (planes, things, objects, bodies, or even concepts)”.¹²⁵ A space that exists in simultaneousness to and because of the articulation of the surface that contains an edge from which there is a position of being against.

¹²² Didi-Huberman expands on this idea of the detail and looking further in *The art of not describing* - ‘The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch’, in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1989. 135 – 169. This essay is repeated in an extended form in the appendix of *Confronting Images: Questioning the end of a certain history of art*.

¹²³ Didi-Huberman. 16

¹²⁴ Ibid. 143 - 144

¹²⁵ Ricardo Basbaum, "Within the Organic Line and After," in *Art after Conceptual Art* ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, Generali Foundation Collection Series (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006). 87

This rendering that results from a simultaneousness of thesis and antithesis was first approached in this research in an earlier work, *Holding on Looking down*, (2010) but further explored in *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011). In both instances the rend became understood through the relationships formed between the components that constructed the whole, which formed the work. In each installation the components demanded, through their placement and construction, reliance upon the other components to sure up their own position. In both these outcomes the *suring-up* of each position though, came out of the corrosive effect that each element was able to play on the others.

So within *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), the solid foundation of the floor that allowed for a precarious insertion of the broom/mop handles, which subsequently held the box heads, added to the present sense of precariousness. Yet this played against the solidity of a video monitor placed on the same foundation (it can't fall any further). The physical surety of the photograph, which was having the traditional values of the image (surface, colour etc) ruined by the physical surety of the neon and, which when reversed reduced the neon to the role of a de-facto ridiculously overworked title label. Yet they formed a conceptual alliance around communication strengthening each other, *any worries? many worries!* The photograph containing images of the objects located in the room threw out the question about which was signifying which? Combined, they all contributed to a *suring-up* developed through the simultaneousness of being present while being cut down, while cutting down through being present. As Calasso said, "Everything that happens, happens this way, or that way, or this other way"¹²⁶ at the same time.

¹²⁶ Calasso. 136

It is ever being made and the later chapters have the capacity to rewrite the past.¹²⁷

Like Kaya Silverman's "internally written" Book of Life (an analogy that she uses to describe a condition of eternal interiority) that is being written from the inside out as each subsequent chapter bears upon the previous, so too the material of the elements that make up *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), bear upon its continual unfolding. Through this encountering, a continuous rewriting, an evolving of the wholes position of solidity becomes solidly unstable. Similarly though, as with Silverman's position, the very presence of an idea of interiority implies an exteriority from which, or against, an understanding of interior can be formed. It is a precarious interiority and exteriority that form through a partial knowing of each, a knowing of each as Other.

[...] and since my contact with myself is "partial coincidence". [...] in any case, when my self is at issue the contact is absolute because it is partial.¹²⁸

It is through the precarious, through the partial, that an idea of absolute may be suggested but only suggested as it can only be approached, not grasped or defined. It is an absolute that can be potentialised through the approach to the liminal because it can only be known to itself.

As Lévinas also questions;

¹²⁷ Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009). 65

¹²⁸ Merleau-Ponty. 183-184

To speak, to write is to attempt to disrupt the definitiveness of eternity; but does the last word belong to the ontological act which is accomplished by discourse and which immures discourse in advance?¹²⁹

Bringing into being, in this case through discourse, is also to bring into being being's own limits. This action of immuring is the best that *I Tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), can ever have hoped to achieve. In relation to the central question of this research, it is only by conceiving (through suggesting the potentiality of the limits) that an interior that suggests an exterior may be considered. A platform can be raised to question from.

LIMITATIONS TO THE LIMINAL

The infinite can only be an idea. Like death it is a known unknown. It is only an idea of itself. The definition of itself places it outside of understanding. In the second chapter this was postulated as something that can be hypothesised in relation to the individual within the universal. Kierkegaard talks of this position as infinite resignation. It is a position of resigned not knowing, outside of grasping, without shape. It is important though to understand the difference between this state and a state of forming through not-knowing that is being suggested in this chapter.

"Here is the human. Here is the human. Here is the perfect human".¹³⁰ These sentences start the Jorgen Leth, 1967 film, *The Perfect Human*. The viewer is introduced to the character the Perfect Human simultaneously male and female, or at least a male version and a female version of the singular human. The Perfect Human is

¹²⁹ Lévinas. 152

¹³⁰ Jorgen Leth, "The Perfect Human," (DVD, Denmark: Det Danske Filminstitut, 1967).

seen in a white room with no features, they perform a series of actions, jumps, falling, eating. The whole is looked at closely, broken down into parts to be reconfigured in an attempt to articulate its wholeness. Limitations are questioned. What can the Perfect Human do, what can he/she not do? In the staking of these limitations (what can be done or not done) a position is constructed into which Leth articulates his Perfect Human. In this strategy he also stakes the position of the non-perfect human, or other, against which the perfect is defined.

The idea of perfection that there can be a singular (an essence, an absolute) from which all else can be measured, is stated as a strategy upfront. It automatically brings into its discussion the non-perfect, the non-absolute, that throws the subjective against any form of literal representation. So what is Leth doing? He is not representing the perfect human through the actors (Majken Algren Nielsen and Claus Nissen), rather he is raising an idea. The idea of limitation implying that which is beyond limitation; the impossible idea of the perfect human. It is a position articulated with some clarity in the Lars Von Trier film *The Five Obstructions*, (2003), within which Leth agrees to remake his short film according to five different sets of obstacles that Von Trier imposes into the process.¹³¹ In the fourth obstruction Von Trier dictates that the film must be remade as an animation and it is within this (the most removed from the traits of humanity by the accentuation applied through the techniques of animation) that the representation or an idea of the representation is best articulated. The animated characters represent the representation in an act of doubling and it is in the representation that both the ideas of perfect and imperfect can reside. The fiction that has no obligation to truth or fact except in that it is not. Through this use of animation, this fiction, Leth is able to simultaneously form two binary positions; the human and the non-human. In doing so

¹³¹ Lars von Trier, "The Five Obstructions," (DVD, Port Washington, NY: Koch Vision Entertainment, 2004).

he articulates, in that Blanchotian model, its own limitation even as it sketches out what it is to be human by what it is not.

This opens up the area of representation and the area of limitation known through the duality of being. A duality recognised through a simultaneousness of being which, as Lévinas argues, “[...] is not only itself, it escapes itself.”¹³²

CONSTRUCTING AND FORGETTING

Michael Govan in the catalogue for Lothar Baumgarten’s *AMERICA Invention* (1983), exhibition held at the Guggenheim museum, addresses the problem of representation in addressing Baumgarten’s use of language to represent the Other. It is an action that, he argues, articulates the “limits of our own understanding of ourselves”¹³³ more clearly than its supposed subject of representation because “[we can never directly experience the field outside of the frame, ever outside our consciousness.”¹³⁴ Rather the act of naming, which he highlights in Baumgarten’s work,

[...] becomes a boundary of exchange of identity; it may represent how we see ourselves, how others see us, how we see others, how others see themselves, how others see others.¹³⁵

Although

¹³² Lévinas. 135

¹³³ Michael Govan, "In the Name of the Other," in *Lothar Baumgarten: America Invention*, ed. Lothar Baumgarten and Guggenheim Museum (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1993). 31

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

[...] there is no truly objective overview. There is always an Other – defined as that which is outside and therefore only accessible through representation. Yet inherent in the gulf between self and Other signified in the space of representation, there is something essential about the boundary of difference.¹³⁶

The action of representation works as a clear definition of the self that is enacting the representation *and* defines the idea of an Other, but, only in the form of idea against the self that is enacting the representative action. Self's own Other.¹³⁷ Baumgarten, in the instance of *America – Invention* (1983), is articulating this process through the use of language but it is an argument that can be applied to any form of representation.¹³⁸ Of interest in this action is the articulation of the mechanism of the boundary and boundary creation through the representative act, and the action of forgetting, that is also inherent through the representative action. Both actions form the acknowledged not-known that is used to bring forth questions that proposition an outline of an idea of an absolute. It is these two areas that the remainder of this chapter shall explore.

CONSTRUCTING

The outcome *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, (2012), was first shown at Rae & Bennett gallery. The gallery has a large glass window at the front, an indication of its former use as a shop, and an allowance for a viewing position outside of the gallery space, on the street. For the exhibition *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, (2012), the wall (facing the front

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ please see chapter 1 for extended discussion on self and Other.

¹³⁸ Lothar Baumgarten's practice explores the mechanics of representation through multiple strategies not all of them involving text as language.

window and the front door) was covered with an adhesive fabric wallpaper containing an image of a close up photograph of orange loquat fruit, hanging amongst green leaves, set against the sky. The colour of the sky was altered from a bright sky blue to a lime or keylime green/yellow.



Figure 14. Kiron Robinson, *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, 2012

Positioned on top of this wallpaper were two photographic images. The photographs were 100cm x 100cm, inkjet prints, mounted on di-bond and installed onto the wall so that they hovered 2 – 3cm off the wall and wallpaper. The photograph hanging on the left, from the facing position, contained in the foreground an image of a caged parrot. The background of the photograph, seen through the cage of the parrot, held the appearance of an outdoor beach location. The photograph was shot with a very short aperture resulting in an extremely thin focal plane. Instead of the focal point being on the parrot in the foreground, it was situated at what might be termed the middle ground of the image, the back bars of the parrot's cage. This short aperture also made it hard to distinguish details of the background; specifics were reduced to loose colour arrangements. Overlaid on top of this photograph were two coloured bars, purple and pink, running vertically down the image. They were approximately 2cm in width each. The purple bar resided in the middle of the frame, the pink bar more towards the right

of the image, not quite at the point halfway between the purple bar and the right hand edge of the photograph.

The second photograph situated to the right of the parrot image was also shot with a short aperture and again the focal point was towards the middle ground of the image, behind what was presented (through the framing) as the subject of the image. This photograph displayed a grouping of cows contained within a cattle truck. The background of this image was composed of the side of a second transport truck carrying soft drink. The composition of the photograph emphasised the crowding of the transported animals by containing them in the bottom third of the frame. The framing and the shallow focal plane resulted in not any one cow being seen completely. Rather the cows resembled a series of brown humps or hills amplified by the focal point resting on the contour of a cow's spine with neither head nor tail in view.

Underneath these photographs painted by brush directly onto the wallpaper fabric in black ink was placed a phrase. The phrase read,

they had entered an uneasy truce both wanted not to talk but the relationship
could not sustain unprovoked silence

The phrase (written in a cursive script) contained no punctuation. The phrase began on the left hand side of the wall and fell away to the bottom right hand corner of the wall, following the imaginary arc of the someone pivoting, from a fixed location, across and down in the action of applying the ink to the wall. The phrase was broken into four lines dictated again by the imaginary reach of the implied hand that applied the ink to the wall.



Figure 15. Kiron Robinson, *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, (detail), 2012.

In between this wall and the glass window frontage was a blue pole. The pole extended from the roof to the floor, approximately 4 metres. The pole was constructed in a modular form from a series of irregularly sized, blue, compressed PVC, triangularly shaped components, each approximately 4cm in diameter at their widest point. The components were linked, end to end, through a series of nails hidden from view. The components were a found material and carried with them the signs of history, dirt, faded, uneven colour and weathering. They appeared to be a material used in construction but the clarity of what function they may have served originally was unclear. The pole contained a severe bend, as though under a weight and close to the point of collapse. When viewed from the front of the gallery or through the window this blue pole interrupted and intersected with the images and text on the facing wall.

As with the earlier installation *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011) each element within *I (who) What (what) [Hello]*, (2012), depended upon each of the other elements for definition even as they defined. The colour bars on the parrot image allowed for a deliberate separation to occur from the wallpaper. The bars turned one of the photographic images into armature while still allowing it to be a photograph. This doubling of reason-for-being or usage, as both image and as armature for the two colour bars, also allowed the wallpaper to exist as its own entity. Not just as an armature for the photographic images and text but as armature and wallpaper, that is, decorative image

with its own presence. It is a strategy borrowed, specifically in relationship to the photographic, from the Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco.

In the *Atomists*[...]So I was thinking maybe we need to disturb the photograph with something, and in this case I decided to disturb it with some kind of structure, some kind of geometric thing that will cancel, partially, the photo, and that will reveal the photo in a different way.¹³⁹

It is a strategy that is designed to reveal through concealing. The pole and the bars intersected to highlight the verticality in the arrangement. The certainty of the verticality of the coloured bars highlighted the uncertainty or precariousness of the blue pole, which was literally bending from the pressure created from being inserted between the floor and the roof. The apparent completeness of the coloured bars offset the conceit of the blue pole; that it is only ever in a state of hold. The evident constructive values, the modular fabrication barely holding together, reveal its own physicality.

This was also a reverse relationship. The bend that promised to move at touch and so change its arrested form highlighted the surety of the coloured bars that sat so out of place on the plane of the image. So certain in their colour and form as subject, which was at odds to the representational nature of the photographic image and to the potentiality of form of the blue pole.

The text acted in the part that alluded to the relationships extending beyond the formal elements of the work. The implication of two positions between which a relationship

¹³⁹ Benjamin Buchloh, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, and Megan Sullivan, "To Make an Inner Time: A Conversation with Gabriel Orozco," *October* no 130, no. (Fall 2009). 178

existed and yet an ambiguity of where exactly these relationships could be found. On a surface level it could be seen to be the relationship between the artist, via the work, and the viewer, but also if (as argued in the first chapter) the artist can only inhabit the position of first viewer, then it was a self-referring relationship between the Other present within each element of the work (including the viewing element). It is the question of being here and not here; certain in its uncertainty. Hand formed, it held the only position of uniqueness, when encountered on a material level. Unique in that it retained a trace or index of the body from which it was formed. It acted as a stand-in for the unique hand, which may be thought of as the artist's. But it also doubled in its agency to alert to the fact that this was a conceit. To gesture so may also be seen as an action that has arisen out of a certain necessity, a need for urgency, and a practicality of immediacy.

In its wholeness *I (who) What (what) [Hello]*, (2012), is a drawing of the boundary that Govan refers to with regards to Baumgarten's work. A boundary found through a simultaneousness, which results in an un-actualised position. No thing is stable, it is all precarious.

There is a parallel here with Nedko Solakov's work *A Life (Black and White)*, (1998), in which, for the duration of its exhibition, Solakov instructed (simultaneously) two painting crews to paint the gallery walls black and white. Each action obliterating the action of the other as it itself is obliterated. The painting pairs moved in roughly a similar speed, in the same direction, so that, again roughly, at any one time in the exhibition the gallery was half black and half white. Constantly in a state of flux, *A Life (Black and White)*, (1998), presents not merely the duration of its creation and existence but also the fact that it exists in this incompleteness at every moment.

The incompleteness of the work of art delivers it to an unactualised instant.¹⁴⁰

It is the incompleteness that delivers an unactualised instant. It is in this position of unactualisation where Solakov's work and this research meet. Each element simultaneously builds or constructs the potential of the other materials present. It is a building that takes place through an obliterating (an obliterating of a singular) which results in (as Didi-Huberman succinctly states it in relation to Fra Angelico) a singularity that is passed on in the work "but also breaks up to the point of its unravelling completely, so as to displace its paths and make them *signify* elsewhere."¹⁴¹

I (who) What (what) [Hello], (2012) and *A Life (Black and White)*, (1998), act as a definitive non-definitive. They are both what they are and what they are not and can only be known in this dual state. In Govan's argument this is possible through the action of forming the boundary through the representative action and it is through the path of representation that a position beyond becomes potentialised. It is the forming of Lygia Clarke's organic line, this time on a conceptual relational level, between the material elements with the work rather than a direct formal level.

Didi-Huberman continues on to argue that this knowing, being certain, or being sure, which allows for a position of not knowing, can be achieved through the simultaneous action (on behalf of the viewer) which in the first chapter is argued as the position from which an understanding of the self of the maker is formed, of maintaining;

¹⁴⁰ Nedko Solakov, "Nedko Solakov : A 12 1/3 (and Even More) Year Survey," ed. Casino Luxembourg., Rooseum, and O.K Centrum für Gegenwartskunst. (Wien ; Bozen: Folio Verlag, 2003). 174

¹⁴¹ Didi-Huberman. 16

[...] a gaze that would not draw close only to discern and recognise, to name what it grasps at any cost – but would, first, distance itself a bit and abstain from clarifying everything immediately.¹⁴²

The distancing being referred to here pertains to the action of looking, a pause on the scrutinising of the surface of an image for details from which to create meaning, which resulting in an;

[...] alternative, a dialectical moment – surely unthinkable in positivist terms – consisting of not-grasping the image, of letting oneself be grasped by it instead: thus of *letting go of one's knowledge about it*. The risks are great, of course. The beautiful risks of fiction.¹⁴³

It is the same strategy that is at play in the re-photography of Richard Prince discussed in the first chapter of this exegesis,

The ambiguity of Prince's rephotographs is that they are at once 'more' than life and empty. By attributing to the rephotograph the status of a fiction, Prince allows it not to represent reality, whether mimetically or indexically, but rather to 'imagine' it. This imagined reality of the photograph is pure possibility, a possibility that will never be fulfilled and will never disappoint. ...We are not asked to doubt the images for the sake of something more real behind them.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Ibid. 16

¹⁴³ Ibid. 16

¹⁴⁴ Newman. 106

This is a strategy that allows for an imaginative action which is outside of the problem of representation but which can only be found through and with the idea of representation.

This duality of function as a subject (through which not-knowledge can become active, build up and “signify elsewhere”)¹⁴⁵ arises in the collision through reception and viewing which actively requires an action of letting go of knowing, while knowing, and entering an open ended state of aporia. Doubt is foregrounded as a material. A state encouraged by the field of fiction. For what does the work of art owe to the idea of fact? This state correlates with Kierkegaard’s writing on the relationship of the singular to the absolute. Through the Socratic methodology of questioning from multiple, sometimes oppositional positions, Kierkegaard is able to outline the possibility of this relationship that is intrinsically incomprehensible to any outside of the relationship. And so, it can be argued, enters into the world of fiction. It is a position that is outside of language as language brings it back into the realm of the universal. It is the same way in which death was discussed by Blanchot. It is a position that is incomprehensible to those outside of it that can be comprehended as a position of potentiality but not articulated except in a state of “supreme doubt”.¹⁴⁶

In this same way all the elements within *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), act as representations of representation. The elements represent, and in doing so, contradict each other. This was extended through the work *I Ham*, (2012), exhibited at Lowrise gallery in 2012. *I Ham*, (2012), came directly out of *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), and acted as a condensation and extension of the various ideas articulated in that work. *I*

¹⁴⁵ Didi-Huberman. 16

¹⁴⁶ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*. 95

Ham, (2012), consisted of a resin cast of a cardboard fruit box perched atop a domestic mop handle. Both the box and the pole were cast and coloured a matte black. The colouring of the resin occurred through an internal process, of adding dye to one part of the two part resin mix, not through an external painting of the objects. This box also contained a series of partnered holes on its four sides. Similarly to the fruit boxes used in *I tried. There. Reality.*, (2011), when the box was in its inverted position atop the pole, the holes acted to create an anthropomorphic effect taking the form of eyes, which, from the lolling position of the perch, looked upwards. The pole was inserted into the floor of the gallery so that it held its own (and the boxes') weight without any external armature.



Figure 16. Kiron Robinson, *I Ham*, 2012.



Figure 17. Kiron Robinson, *I Ham*, (detail), 2012.

In the fourth version¹⁴⁷ of *The Perfect Human*, (1967), reworked in Lars Von Trier's film *The Five Obstructions*, (2004), (where Leth was required to make an animation), the narrator, at the point of reworking the questions about limitations, intones, "focusing,

¹⁴⁷ Please see references above to the Lars Von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* to understand how this is referred to as a "version" of Jorgen Leth's film.

concentrating, get it down in simple sentences. Jacket. Jacket.”.¹⁴⁸ This occurs whilst the animation displays the Perfect Human putting on a jacket and taking it off and putting it on in a cycle of increasing pace. On, off, on, off, on. In the quest for the defining of this ideal of perfection a loop seems to be activated, a constant question around the idea of the ideal housed within the action of putting on and taking off a jacket. An action that is action without the end, having a jacket on or off, but in rather in constant flux or oscillation; a constant unactualised instant. The animation allows this unactualisation to be held ad infinitum.

This instant of unactualisation is where the precariousness of the material in *I Ham*, (2012), holds itself. The precariousness and subsequent state of anxiety resides in the realisation of the reality of its material matter. It is a cast of a box on a cast pole while still being a box on a pole. In being both simultaneously it is also simultaneously not singularly being either.

Similarly in *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011), the matter of the material never rests. It is referred in a circular motion through itself – to the cardboard box, to the future cast, to the photograph - all the while being cheered on by the constancy of call and response in the blinking neon declaring the self evident, “any worries, many worries”, the inconsistency of the pleading “believe, please, believe” (or is it “believe, believe, please” or a myriad of other variants each with different accentuations), and the huddling of the boxed prepubescent pigeon. This cheering amplifies both the anxiety of the materiality of the objects and the conceptual anxiety and precariousness within the work. The conceptual anxiety and precariousness comes around the idea of being sure, sure of belief, sure in belief, sure to believe.

¹⁴⁸ Trier.

In *I Ham*, (2012), this simultaneousness (of being unactualised at the moment of actualisation), is reached through its affirmation as an art object. This point of realisation is the point of crumbling between known and re-known; the reality shift or boundary that is found through the representational act. As in *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011), and *I (who) What (what) [Hello]*, (2012), it acts as an approach to the liminal found through that moment of being unmade and made. Through this action of shifting or being held eternally in the state of the shift. On and off.

FORGETTING

Locating that moment when something is moved outside of being, a positioning to enter the arena of forgotten, is a strategy the artist Lothar Baumgarten uses again and again. The action of forgetting is the second area to be drawn out of the work of representation. It is in the realm of the forgotten that the absolute that is the infinite is found and it is here that death parallels the forgotten. To be forgotten is to cease to be.

But forgetting is not a punctual event. It is over before it begins, and it closes in on itself and separates itself from time as a chronological flow. Forgetting defects from time and from initiative. When the time of forgetting comes it will simultaneously have been forgotten and so too will have been forgotten, its anticipation.¹⁴⁹

In his work in *AMERICA Invention* (1983), Baumgarten sets about locating this point - of forgotten.

¹⁴⁹ Wall.p 89

The work consists of the writing (on the parapet of the Guggenheim Museum) of the names of North American and South American indigenous tribes. The North American names are written from the top to the bottom following the logic of source tribes' native geographical location. So the northern most tribe is located at the top of the parapet and the southern most tribe at the bottom. Intersecting this spiral is the reverse spiral of those tribes from South America. The logic is the same but reversed. Starting in Tierra Del Fuego and moving northwards the tribes' names are written from the bottom to the top of the parapet spiral. The elevator shaft, which intersects the parapet spiral like a spine, acts as a meridian upon which the names flip orientation as they cross it.

The complexities of this work are vast. The strategy of naming not only highlights political questions raised around colonisation and the power relations involved in the idea of the name and naming itself but (for this research's purpose), the main question that is raised through this work revolves around the idea of writing, not as a means to remember, but a tool that enhances forgetting.

Within this work the names of the tribes do not so much act as a memorial for those which are not there, but highlights the moment that they were forgotten. Removed by language outside of language, through the alteration of being brought into language, in the first place. Any quick study of the development of the Native American tribal names (through the colonial languages of English, Spanish and French), demonstrates the loss that occurs through this process as a bastardisation of phonetics, geography and other general descriptors that come to bear upon the final result. Baumgarten alerts us to this process and the erasure. This results in an exertion of power, and so he speaks

to that which is not, that which is outside of language and therefore outside of existence. As Hal Foster in his catalogue essay articulates;

In *Phaedrus* Plato saw writing not as a crucial memory device but as a catastrophic means of forgetting. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida glosses this famous ambivalence in terms of writing as a *pharmakon*, a term used by Plato that means both poison and remedy. It is this ambiguity of writing as a drug of memory *and* oblivion, of writing as an instrument of violence and reparation, that I see in *AMERICA Invention*.¹⁵⁰

Baumgarten does not, though, reinforce the functions of the inside/outside paradigm by his own use of names, rather he reveals the mechanics that imply the possibility of that which is forgotten. It is only the mechanics that can be revealed here. That which inhabits the state of forgotten cannot, by the nature of being in a forgotten state, be recalled. It is removed outside of the known. A removal that Baumgarten sees in the action of representation that shapes the potentiality of the absolute of the unknown.

If on the one hand the negativity of language is predicated on a conventional understanding of language as that which represents and speaks the non-linguistic, the potentiality of language is predicated on a hypothesis of a world in which the differences between language and the non-linguistic become indeterminate. The later, according to Blanchot, is a world “without existence.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Hal Foster, "Writing on the Wall," in *Autofocus Retina*, ed. Lothar Baumgarten and Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2008). 89

¹⁵¹ Paolo Bartoloni, "Blanchot and Ambiguity," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 4: Ambiguity in Culture and Literature (2010). p 2

The open ended series *All the names in the world, (Sale)*, (ongoing), forms part of a project called *All the names in the world, (ongoing)*. Within *All the names in the world, (Sale)*, a female voice can be heard intoning a series of names. The names are listed alphabetically by their surname, but spoken with their Christian name or the initial that begins their Christian name first. The list is long, some 15 hours long. Derived from the listed population of the area of Sale, Victoria, the voice acts as a remembrance of these names, removing them from the real of relation to the body with whom that name is identified and reducing them, through the performance, as a marker for the non-existence of the real, attached to the label of the name.

Like Baumgarten's *AMERICA Invention* (1983), it too explores the mechanics of forgetting. Whereas Baumgarten highlights the function of the erasure that is evidenced through the act of representation in language, *All the names in the world, (Sale)*, (ongoing), uses the representative act to signify the inevitable movement to the infinite of death or non-being. Through each iteration the plaintively expressed desire of avoiding this fate is compounded, multiplied and quickened. As with the work *Don't forget me (forever)*, (ongoing), (discussed in the second chapter), through the act of bringing into being, articulation (which signifies that which is hoped to be avoided, to be forgotten), the future action of its own annihilation is also brought into being. As Blanchot articulates at the beginning of this chapter, it is through this dual action that the work self articulates its inevitable "slide into the distress of the infinite."¹⁵²

¹⁵² Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*.p 26

POSSIBLE AND POTENTIAL

There is for me no difference between the supposedly grand questions or grand subjects and the small questions which relate to everyday life. Everyday life is part of infinity. The mere fact of indicating a separate everyday is inadequate: there is no more everyday than there is eternal; each day is a possibility of eternity.¹⁵³

It is only within possibility that that which is outside of articulation can be. It is a possibility that sits alongside, parallel to everything. *Everyday, life, eternal*, are all words that are suggestive of a lived experience, but it can only be known through the possibility of the dubious infinite of the unknown; of not-being, a beyond life, an anxious state. Yet in the position of individual (as the individual relates to the communal) there is a sense of the infinite because the communal is finite. Finite in that it allows no position outside of itself. It is only when the individual is addressed on the terms of the absolute that the certainty of the infinite as defined by the finite is questionable. Because beyond the cessation of life through the lived, experience is an unknown

Kierkegaard articulates a potentiality for a relationship between the self and an absolute to exist. He understands the limitations of this, though, as it relates to the task of articulation; representation. It is a possibility as can only be found in the potentiality of fiction. There can be no allowance for corroboration to the action of being outside of articulation. As there can be no understanding of death for the living. There can only be an approach through the dubious proposition of the outlining of what is not. It is a precarious proposition, propositioned by inadequate tools.

¹⁵³ Erick Morse, "Here to Eternity: An Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy," *Frieze* November - December, no. 135 (2010). 119

The research outcomes discussed in this chapter imply an unacceptance at the stasis¹⁵⁴ of positive or negative. An anxiety exists because of the doubt in finality or surety in either the positivity of faith or the negativity of doubt/failure. The binaries of positive and negative are redundant as both foreground a lack of conviction in the surety of the present. Through seeking a position of simultaneousness in the binaries brought into play through the work, this state of anxiety is formed. It is not a state that is anxious in and of itself but rather a state of aporia that allows for a questioning through which that which cannot be addressed through articulation (that which is beyond articulation) can be suggested. It is a position that finds a similarity with John Keats' *Negative Capability*, a position that rejects categorical knowledge, rather it is a state that seeks to house itself in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".¹⁵⁵ An unstable present to allow an approach at what is outside of the present or the represent.

The work is the eternal failing. It is a small death repeatedly articulating its own non-existence through its striving to be.

Anxiety is a mood in which whomever it possesses is anxious not about any particular item or aspect of life, but about the totality of existence as the question of its own contingency, and about death as the possibility of the impossibility of existing.¹⁵⁶

[...] it was obvious that for her this visitor, who should not have been there, evoked someone who belonged there.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ This term is being used in the way defined in the second chapter of this exegesis, which when approached through the universal is the position that is found.

¹⁵⁵ John Keats and Sidney Colvin (ed), *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends*, Cambridge Library Collection (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 2011). 48

¹⁵⁶ Clark. 47

¹⁵⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *Death Sentence*, trans., Lydia Davis (New York: Station Hill Press, 1978). 45

CONCLUSION

This research was triggered by the complexity of a question about communicating my belief to my son. In contemplating the *how* of the desire to impart that which I hold dear about myself to someone that I hold dear (my son), I was confronted with the abyss of separation between singularities and the inadequacies of the act of communication to patch that interminable space. This contemplation led to the question of belief in a general sense. How can the focus of belief, which is based in the not-known, be communicated when by its definition it is beyond definition?

This research has been an attempt at trying to find a framework to approach this gap. It has been an attempt to find form to articulate, that which was outside of my capabilities to articulate. It has been a question that, through the process of examination, alerted to the containment of a certain absurdity. The idea of articulating that which is defined as beyond articulation, by bringing into the realm of the known what is defined as outside of the known, while maintaining its outsideness is, by its own definition, impossible. Yet this research has defined this as the nature of belief. It is an understanding of belief that is actualised through the paradoxical action of faith and doubt. This is the paradox of faith into which this research located itself.

So the question asked of the conclusion is what have I done? What have I found over these years, is there any answer I can give to my friend who first asked me the question, and is there anything I can articulate to my son?

THE TWO PARTS

This research has sought to define belief as a constructive action of faith and doubt. These two materials are integral to the differentiation of belief from knowledge. It is a definition that has been drawn out of a close reading of Kierkegaard and his reaction to the Hegelian argument of an Absolute Idealism. Specifically this research has leant on Kierkegaard because of the similarity of the question driving the respective research practices. Kierkegaard was seeking to articulate this not-known, whom he addresses as God, or at least the action of his belief in the not-known through faith and doubt. Similarly, this research has been seeking the possibility of an articulation of that which is beyond articulation. While this research has not addressed my own particular beliefs in any direct sense they have always been a constant presence in seeking to articulate a framework through belief.

The installation nature (assembled with great care in relation to the specificity of the site) of my studio based research creates a difficulty in attempting to reflect exactly on the final presentation. Through the studio based research though, the bearing that each work had on the formation of the next and the compounding that occurred as each work was formed and allowed to bear upon that which was already present allows for a confident reflection on the conceptual voice of the final outcome.

MATERIAL OUTCOMES

The studio component of my research works through an extension of a photographic way of thinking, particularly an extension of a way of thinking with regards to an analogue process of photography. It is a working methodology grounded in limitation, which results in strategies of finding and reframing, looking and selecting, including and excluding; a way defined by boundaries. Primarily the question of the index and the

indexical action, which is so imbued in photographic discourse, has become the prevalent strategy that has driven my studio research and has presented as the potential area for further research. It is a methodology that is based on the indexical relationship found within material components articulating both the position of representation (in which they reside within the material outcomes) and the 'real' of their initial use function.

This indexical relationship is a significant strategy for the articulation of the state of simultaneousness that has become central to addressing the research question. In each component of this address - the individual, the universal, the absolute - this strategy parallels to the conceptual/philosophical area of address within the chapters; the self as it's own other, the individual defined by and defining the universal and the individual in relation to the universal and the absolute. It is a strategy that allows for an oscillation in the understanding of the material as a function of representation and also within the viewer in the role of interpreter in the moment of encounter with the material outcomes.

The idea of the simultaneous index, which is raised through the latter outcomes of my studio research and discussed within the third chapter of the exegesis, is of interest to me when considering where this research might lead. This research argues that a state of simultaneousness is a key outcome in the questioning of the potential outworking of the communication of belief.

The position of the viewer, in relation to the encounter with the work, has been paralleled to the relationship of the believer (or enactor of faith) and the encounter with the representational device of the belief. It is a complex position that is extrapolated

within the exegesis, particularly in the first chapter. Suffice it to say, it is a position that when enacted (this research has argued) enables an anxious state.

Through the studio research I have produced outcomes that have led to a gradual forming of a precarious framework and a way of addressing this framework, which also contributes to the formation of the framework. The processes of unfolding and simultaneity have also become processes informing the structure of the exegesis.

In the final exhibition component of this research the site of the gallery will be used to a similar end. The site will be utilised to articulate an unfolding that corresponds to the conceptual stages within this exegesis, while situating the material of the studio outcomes in relation to one another. The intention will be to enact a simultaneous index that allows a new potentiality through the questioning that each outcome (and material therein) bears on each other. It is anticipated that the movement through the site of the gallery will enable this unfolding process to extend via a compounding. As the outcomes have been generated through the course of this research they have enacted a conceptual compounding bearing heavily upon the next outcome. This will be reflected through the installation of the final exhibition. A seemingly oppositional strategy, but when readdressed through the possibility of a simultaneous encounter it can be seen (and is argued) as complimentary.

THE EXEGESIS

This exegesis has been situated alongside the studio outcomes of this research. It provides a platform from which to approach the final material presentation of my research.

In approaching the question of this research, the exegesis has been divided into three parts to reflect the unfolding process identified through the studio component. In the exegesis this has been explored through three distinct states drawn from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* - the individual, the universal and the absolute. Within each of the chapters, that are framed by these states, particular material outcomes have been addressed through the lens of the particular state in which they have been located. This has allowed a situating of the relationship between the philosophical questioning and the studio research.

The three chapters have formed an approach to reaching conclusions that can be found within Akira Kurosawa's 1950 film, *Rashomon*. In *Rashomon*, a central narrative that revolves around an encounter between three protagonists - a bandit, a samurai and the samurai's wife - is examined in a search for a truth. Through a series of different characters' voices this central narrative is examined four times. Each of the paths of the stories varies from each other but the narrative conclusions end in similar locations. Someone remains dead, someone remains raped and a dagger remains stolen.¹⁵⁸ The key to this film is not the conclusions but the varied paths that are navigated and how these bear on the narrative end point. In a similar way this exegesis has, within each chapter, proposed what appear like similar end points. The point of convergence though is in the journey that led to these conclusions. The seemingly repetitious nature of the conclusions are integral to providing both the outline for the next engagement and when formed together (through the unfolding process of progressing through the chapters) key to forming an overarching final position of questioning.

¹⁵⁸ Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon* (London: BFI Video Publishing,), videorecording.

In the first chapter an approach was made through the idea of the individual. The individual was framed through the term 'the self'. This research has argued that belief is an action that can only be held by the individual, the singular self. As such this position of the individual is a position that has needed to be questioned and defined. The exegesis makes a correlation between the self that is formed through the encounter with the art object and the self identified within the definition of Kierkegaard's individual, of the believer who enacts belief. It is a self that is identified through limit; the limit of self that is known through the encounter. It is argued that it is from the recognition of the self, known through the limit of self, that an outside of self can be conceptualised. In this action (created through the encounter), this research argues, any conceptualisation of an outside of limit enacts belief, a belief, though, that is housed in doubt and faith. Through Giorgio Agamben's term *whatever*, this research introduces fiction as a key constructional ingredient in the forming of a "perpetually delayed"¹⁵⁹ space within which the potential of belief may reside.

Through positioning of the idea of self, the idea of simultaneousness is first introduced. This idea of simultaneousness in relation to the self was drawn from Emmanuel Lévinas' argument of the self that is known through the recognition of self, as self's own Other. Knowing of self as Other first to then know a self as self, Lévinas argues, can only be found through the encounter - the encounter with the Other. It is an encounter that is mediated through representation.

This proposition is paralleled to the position of the artist and the viewer through the material outcomes *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), in which it has been argued (in relation to Lacan's ideas on the gaze and Barthes' discussion on

¹⁵⁹ Wall. 124

the photographic found within *Camera Lucida*), that the artist inhabits the position of first viewer through which the self, articulated as the artist, is propositionally known. It is a proposition that is then expanded to reflect the relationship of any viewer, who through the encounter with the representation of the artist (the work) is able to define their self of the creator artist, which in turn defines their self as creator. Through the material of the photographic print and the index of the process of the photograph that is retained in *Drip, Stain, Leak*, (2010), and *Leak, Stain, Drip*, (2010), a simultaneous state of representation as representation is articulated to facilitate the conceptual boundaries that are being defined.

The first chapter concludes with a parallel drawn between Giorgio Agamben's term *whatever* and the space that is attempting to be opened up in relation to the self through the encounter with the work *When I write I write for you* (2013). As stated above this also opens up the idea of fiction as a space to examine (and propose) a potential location from which to raise the core question of that which is outside of articulation. It is a parallel based on the inability of either position to be known outside of the representative act; known through its potential and by what it is not.

The second chapter, reflecting the unfolding strategy identified within the studio based research and intended for the final research exhibition, builds upon this idea of self (as defined in the first chapter) but repositions it within the relationship of the individual and the universal. The second chapter has taken a closer reading of the Kierkegaard text *Fear and Trembling*, and combined Kierkegaard's definition of the universal with Bernard Stiegler's articulation of technicity. In doing this the exegesis has outlined a definition of the term *universal* that correlates to the studio based exploration of this idea. This is an important point of definition. The universal has been identified as the location of knowledge; knowledge in the empirical sense. It is the known that is

defined through knowing. This research has argued that the relationship between this position of the universal and the self (as defined in the first chapter) is critical for the potentiality of what can be not-known and this can be reflected through the material choices that form the studio based research.

Within Kierkegaard's writing he acknowledges that the universal is the position from which he interprets the Abrahamic story of the sacrifice of Isaac. It is a position that he locates himself within because his knowledge of the Abrahamic story is mediated through the act of representation. Again this position is argued as being paralleled by the encounter with the outcomes of the studio based research. The exegesis has argued that it is an encounter with the act of representation that alerts to the universality of both the encountered and encounterer, but one that also alerts to the infinite within this.

Through looking at Kierkegaard's arguments as outlined in *Fear and Trembling*, a position is stated that this encounter with the representation of the object of faith (or part thereof), through the lens of the universal, enacts doubt that simultaneously erodes while forming the base action of faith that constructs the belief.

In his grappling with the justification of Abraham's actions, Kierkegaard proposes a position of the individual in "absolute relation to the absolute";¹⁶⁰ that which is outside of the individual relationship to the universal. He also acknowledges that this position can only be found through the recognition of the universal through encountering Abraham's actions as murderous. It is a simultaneous position of being both individual in relationship to the absolute known only to the individual, but also the individual in

¹⁶⁰ Kierkegaard. 55 - 56

relationship to the universal known through the representative action. Kierkegaard's argument is aligned with the position of the viewer as outlined in the first chapter. He argues from the position of the self knowing the self through the encounter.

This paradox of faith, of simultaneously being the individual in relation to the universal and the absolute (as Kierkegaard calls it), leads him to a point of "infinite resignation".¹⁶¹ A point from which the potentiality of the infinite is acknowledged, but the impossibility of entering into it through the absurdity of faith is also acknowledged.

It is in this point of 'infinite resignation' that this research has argued the material outcomes *Used Hours/Wasted Hours*, (ongoing) and *Don't forget me*, (forever), (ongoing) are situated. This exegesis positions these works alongside the works of On Kawara, Francis Alÿs and Tehching Hsieh and a concept of the contemporary as defined by Boris Groys of being "with time rather than in time".¹⁶²

These alignments are crucial in relation to the defining of the self in relation to the universal to propose a location outside of this. This exegesis argues that (as Kierkegaard theorises) Abraham's position as both the individual in absolute relation to the absolute and the individual in relation to the universal, so too the declarative voice of the here-and-now, as with the studio based research outcomes addressed, enacts the simultaneous state of not-and-never. This research recognises that one accompanies the other and as such both do not have to be the overt voice within the outcomes, rather there is always the implied voice (in a similar fashion to the

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 46

¹⁶² Groys, *Going Public*. 94

understanding of the individual that was defined in the first chapter) that is present through it's position of being formed against and is so formed.

The third chapter is the final step in this unfolding process of individual, universal and absolute as realised through the exegesis. This chapter has addressed the issue of simultaneousness that has been discussed in both of the previous chapters and introduces the idea of a simultaneous index formed through the relationship that is enacted in the encounter.

Using death as a metaphor for the absolute, the simultaneous proposition (as suggested in the writing of Blanchot and Derrida in relation to death and the forming of the individual within the individual's relationship to this absolute), is addressed. Derrida argues that death is an action that can only be entered into by the individual and in so doing the individual knows of their self and their non-self through this encounter.¹⁶³ In the encounter with the absolute of death the individual simultaneously knows of the finiteness of life and infiniteness of death. A point of simultaneousness known only through the action of the encounter between the individual and the absolute.

Within this third chapter simultaneousness has been re-examined through a reading of Georges Didi-Huberman and as a material strategy it is situated alongside the work of Roni Horn, Nedko Solakov and Lothar Baumgarten, amongst others. Occupying a simultaneous state is the end position for the question that is proposed for this research. It is only through this state's potential simultaneousness as the self and other

¹⁶³ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*. 55 - 56

(as the individual and the universal), that the potential for the articulation of the absolute that is outside of knowing is formed.

The material outcomes that are addressed in this chapter, *I tried. There. Reality*, (2011), *I Ham*, (2012), *I, (who), What, (what), [Hello]*, (2012) and the project *All the names in the world, (Sale)*, (ongoing) build towards a system of simultaneousness. It has been argued through this research that through the construction of reliance, which comes to bear on definition, each element within the installations formed out of the studio based research also undercuts by being the defined while defining. The exegesis has argued that in this action each element is simultaneously themselves and their Other, themselves and the universal, themselves and the absolute. In the imbroglia of the potential relationships that are offered, a conceptual platform has been (will be) created to consider that which is without. Each material is articulated as both itself and that which it is asked to be through its relationship with the other elements of the material outcome. Through the possibility opened by the position of simultaneousness, being both the individual within the universal and the individual in “absolute relation to the absolute”¹⁶⁴ (the self and its own other, the artist and the viewer), a potentiality is opened up that allows the questions to be formed. It is through questioning, this research has argued, that the outline of what is outside of articulation can be suggested.

CONCLUSION TO THE CONCLUSION

Ultimately this is my answer to my friend, what I can pass on to my son with regards to my beliefs and is my contribution to this field of research - I have no answers. I cannot

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard. 55- 56

contribute an answer to this question. There is no answer, there cannot be any answer, there can only ever be the not-known, the beyond-known, the outside of articulation.

Limit does not allow an answer with regards to the *how* of articulation of belief. Limit which cannot be breached only approached. But limit itself implies an outside of that is not known. Belief is focused into this place, this not-known outside of limit. Being not-known, outside of knowledge it cannot be addressed directly. It cannot be answered. Instead through the positioning of materials that are simultaneously what they are and what they are not, that are asked to define themselves while giving up definition, to be sure in their unsurety, I am constructing a framework which questions. A framework that reflects the anxiety of the paradox of belief. The paradox of being built simultaneously by faith and doubt. It is this framework articulated through form and material that is my contribution to the question of belief.

That is it in and of itself. It is this state that enables doubt, doubt which enacts faith (even as it is enacted by faith) and together they construct a belief. It is a state of precariousness, of anxiousness, which is constructed through unraveling. A state housed in a material form, materials that are rendered unstable being both what they are and what they are not. Used to question the same framework even as they construct. This is what I can pass on to my son, answer to my friend and contribute to this field of research: a framework of questions based in material and form that allows for the articulation of questions, questions that carry with them the potential of answers.

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