

Live Recording: Temporal plasticity and the
indeterminate present in time-based practice.

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Statement of originality

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Abstract

This project investigates the relationship between durational actions and the (re)presentation of documentation within time-based installation. Examining the potential displacement, distortion, and transcendence of time effectuated by the manipulation of recorded information, this project also explores the self-reflexive experience of the artist through controlled actions devised to reflect these altered temporal perspectives.

Repetition and rhythm are key conceptual and formal attributes of this project, in relation to both the actions performed and their mode of representation. The research has been informed by Deleuze's concept of the synthesis of time detailed in *Difference and Repetition* and Albert Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* in particular his position that 'one must imagine Sisyphus happy'. This perspective is complemented by Buddhist philosophy and informs this research through my personal meditation practice.

In the context of this project time has been treated as both material and subject matter; a medium that can be suspended, erased, extended, and ultimately transcended through the use of recording and replay technologies. The transmutation of time as it is experienced has been comparably examined through cognitive means such as meditation and prolonged repetitive action.

Within this project several works by Christian Marclay, Douglas Gordon, Daniel Crooks and Steve Reich provide examples of artists who employ the manipulation and reconfiguration of film, video, and sound to investigate temporal plasticity. While the relationship between the artist's experience of performing actions and the viewer's encounter of documentation is notably evident in the work and process of Tehching Hsieh, Bas Jan Ader and Song Dong and is supported by the writing of Allan Kaprow in *Essays on The Blurring of Life and Art*.

The actions in this project have been performed to no audience. The rationale for this approach is an attempt to preserve the immanent cognitive state of the artist while performing, emphasising the artist's experience as an isolated, integral component of the work. This methodology also removes the privileged position of witnessing a live, originary event and via its documentation, presents a single, and infinitely repeatable, point of view. The understanding and analysis of the viewer's encounter with performance documentation is informed by Philip Auslander's *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*, and Amelia Jones' essay "Presence" in *Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation*.

The works developed through this research apply diverse forms of installation practice, incorporating video, sound, performance and sculpture. The outcomes of studio experimentation present a range of temporal phenomena that collapse, suspend and interminably extend time.

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Central Argument

This research project investigates the relationships between live and recorded events as they are expressed, resolved and presented within time-based installation. Through experimentation with methods of production, manipulation and re-presentation of recorded live events the project explores epistemological notions of an artwork's reception and interpretation.

It is one of the intentions of this project to challenge the idea that the live experience of a performance conveys meaning in a more profound or authentic manner than time-based documentation. This has been pursued within the project via the performance of actions designed to appear mundane that in fact have a powerful immanent effect on the artist. The focus of this investigation is in no way intended to negate the efficacy and power of live performance, but to propose that the first-hand experience of live art alone is not only insufficient, but also not a prerequisite for attaining a deep understanding of the conceptual content or meaning of the work.

Within this project the artist's experience (while performing) is regarded as a major component of the work, an experience that is largely inaccessible to viewers. The relationship between the artist and viewer has been explored via strategies that range from attempts to synthesise the experience of the viewer and artist (*sitting with folding time*) to works that almost exclude the viewer completely (*contingent requiem*). This methodology questions which elements of the process of performance and documentation constitutes the work, examining the line between life and art.

Time is the common medium used to explore the relationships between live and recorded / artist and viewer. The actions performed (by the artist) in this project are predominantly repetitive and mundane; the result of this methodology is a palpable oscillation between an immanent sense of a discontinuous present and a transcendent sense of expectancy and the recollected past. Similarly repetition has been incorporated within the installations with the aim of generating a congruent temporal distortion within the viewer, evoking a self-reflexive awareness of their live encounter with (re)presented documentation. This strategy has been employed to explore the notion of the indexical authenticity of documentation and to enquire ‘what is a live event?’

The conceptual framework of the project has been defined in relation to the following research themes:

truth

This category is concerned with the notion of authenticity and illusion and particularly how Buddhist perspective can frame experience. Key writers include: Sonam Thakchoe for his analysis of the two truths debate within Buddhist philosophy, Dan Ariely for his research into the irrational basis of our behaviour. Artists whose practice informs this category include: John Cage and Nam June Paik.

is it live?

This section examines the notion of the potential 'liveness' of performance documentation. Key to this research theme is the writing of Philip Auslander for his proposition that documentation can reflect the power and authenticity of an artist's work by not viewing it as an 'indexical access point to a past event' (2005) and Amelia Jones' proposition that witnessing performance live does not necessarily provide greater access to the historical truth.

The work of Tehching Hsieh informs this section as an artist whose performance practice is accessed by viewers almost exclusively through documentation.

repetition: rhythm and sustain

Significant writers in this category include: Gilles Deleuze, particularly his concept of the synthesis of time, and foundational notions of repetition from

David Hume and Henri Bergson. Albert Camus' perspective that one must imagine that the condemned mythological King *Sisyphus* is happy influenced the approach to methodology within the project. The exploration of repetition is further supported by the work of artists such as Francis Alÿs and Steve Reich.

time as material (recorded time)

This section is concerned with the manipulation of durational media to affect viewer's temporal perception. Artists that inform this theme include: Douglas Gordon, Christian Marclay and Daniel Crooks.

artist as material (being in time)

The concept of the artist's experience of being in time explored within this project is contextualised by the practice of Song Dong, particularly his works that examine impermanence through temporally focussed performance.

life and art

The notion of the delicate line between life and art that is investigated in this research is framed within context of artists Bas Jan Ader and Agnes Martin and informed by the writing of Alan Kaprow.

Background to the project

To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre...theatre is fake...the knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.' Marina Abramovic¹

This statement raises several issues that influenced the development of this project, principally the notion that something can be real or fake within performance practice, and more broadly the notion of what is real or fake in general. For audiences the reality of theatre is in the knowledge that an actor is acting and the reality of performance art is the knowledge that a performance artist is performing. For me in this context what is real is the phenomenal experience of the audience member, whether they are involved in a participatory artwork, witnessing a transformative performance, or watching a film.

This position of suggesting that one art form is more real than another or that one phenomenon is more real than another becomes insignificant when viewed from the perspective of particle physics or Buddhist philosophy. An

¹ O'Hagan, 2010

interest in quantum physics and my meditation practice have been particularly influential on my practice for several years and have played a significant role in the development of this project. The most significant concept that emerges from these fields is the idea that there are two levels of reality². At the deeper sub-atomic level or from the Buddhist perspective the knife of performance art is also not real, the blood is not real and in fact the performer is not real. This has been an important point of reference in developing this project.

Since relocating to Tasmania in 2009 my practice has been focused on what I refer to as *durational sculpture*; that is the integration of the time-based media of video and sound within a sculptural or installation context. This was a major shift in my practice that took place after what I describe as my divorce from painting.³

My early experiments with time-based media involved manipulations that resulted in reflexive works that positioned the medium itself and the process of the work's production as the content.

The methodology of processing and reprocessing digital video and audio to produce self-referential works aimed to draw analogies between the 'behaviour' of technologies such as digital video cameras, and the human mind.

The work *facilitated forest* (fig. 1) was created by filming a forest from a moving car; the resulting footage was then fast forwarded, re-filmed, replayed, slowed down, replayed and re-filmed again. As a result the video image was broken down into abstracted geometric forms that evoke elemental units or building blocks. The action of re-filming the video

² This is discussed in more detail in the following chapter

³ For several years, including my undergraduate study, I was a dedicated painter working in a primarily intuitive method that could be described as a combination of pure psychic automatism and abstract expressionism.

constructs a self-referential feedback loop, whereby the camera seems to be contemplating its own experiences, in a sense its own memories. This structure simulates both the practice of meditation and a reductionist scientific method, revealing not only the ‘true’ nature of the digital video itself, but also represents the fundamental, sub-atomic nature of the forest.

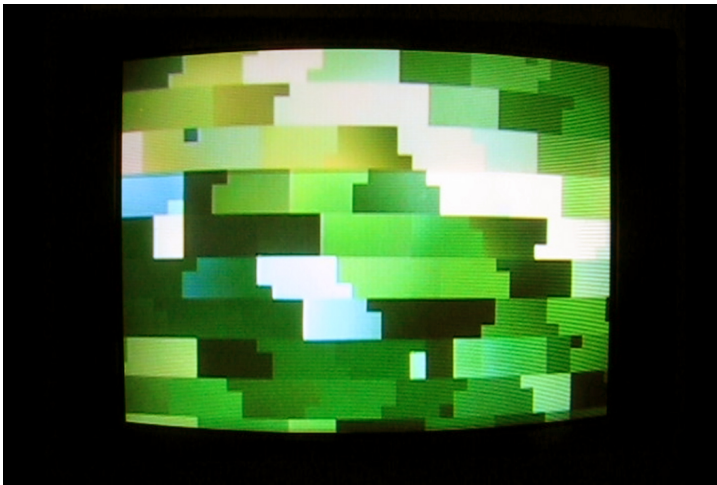


Fig. 1
facilitated forest (2010)
Single channel video, stereo sound, 5:04 min. (video still)

The purpose of this process was to explore the idea that at the level of particle physics all things in the material universe are made of the same basic units; the video representation of the forest and the forest itself are indistinguishable. The works developed through this early process were intended not only to be self-referential but to also indicate self-referential elements of human consciousness.

This concept was a key enquiry of my honours research project. Entitled; *Retrospection, repetition and remix as strategies for the (re)positioning of identity*, the project investigated how the ability to store, retrieve and

manipulate information enables an individual to objectify and potentially redefine their sense of self.

A major component of this research was the creation of *digital surrogates*, recorded versions or extensions of myself that through AV playback could perform tasks in my absence.

The process of developing the work *one born every 0.42154056292 seconds* (fig.2), involved reconfiguring a recording of myself singing 'Happy Birthday', so that the entire song is replayed in roughly 0.42 seconds (the approximate statistical global birth rate). The song, which is repeatedly broadcast for each new person born into the world, has been transformed into an unintelligible, monotonous pulsation. The use of digital technology provides the opportunity to transcend the limitations of my physical self. The significance of this work is that technology permits 'me' to continuously perform this compassionate action through a digital surrogate. Raising questions of authenticity; is it really me doing it? I'm not physically singing 'happy birthday' yet it is my voice and the event occurs as a consequence of my will. The questions raised by this work were a crucial factor in the development of the aspirations of this research project.

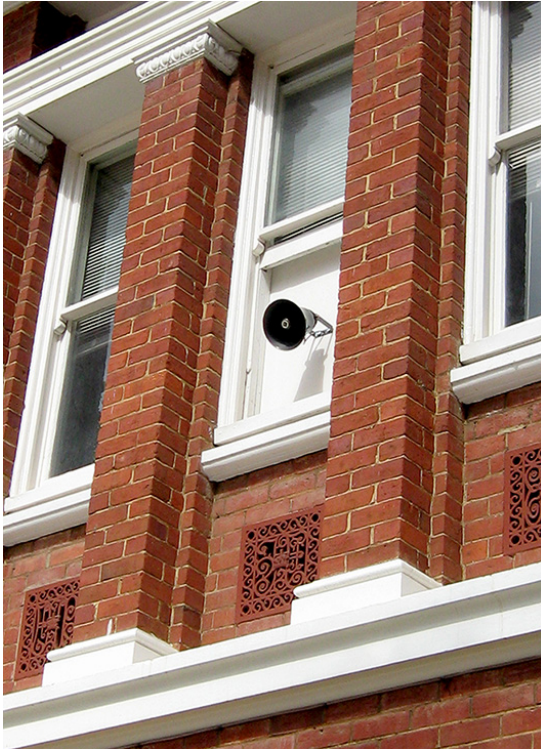


Fig. 2
one born every 0.42154056292 seconds (2010)
Mono sound, 0.42154056292 seconds

The methodological approach used in the development of this work correlates to the strategy employed in the development of *folding time* (2013), however in the case of *folding time* the process itself is a more significant component of the work.

The earlier works mentioned above are concerned with a mediated transformation of information, whereas *one born every 0.42154056292 seconds* was one of the first cases of employing (as much as possible) an information-preserving transformation⁴. This process and the implications for the relationship between artist and viewer have been refined and further developed within the research project.

⁴ This strategy is discussed in greater detail within the methodology chapter.

one born every 0.42154056292 seconds was the first instance in which I performed an action as part of the methodology of creating a work. This was a case of exploring the concept of extending the self through documented actions rather than a desire to perform. The most extreme instance of this exploration is evident in the speculative work *DV me DV you* (2010) (fig. 4)



Fig. 3
DV me DV you, (2010)
Single channel video, 37min.

This work was a relatively simple experiment exploring the idea of ‘capturing’ the self, which is then re-embodied within the structure of the AV playback technology. The performative element of the work was a symbolic attempt to unite with or reflect the video camera by staring continuously into the lens while in a meditative state. It was my intention to simulate the objective nature of the camera. The resulting footage when displayed on a video monitor evoked the sense that ‘I’ had been embodied, that an alternate version of myself now exists in digital form within the monitor.

This work has been consequential to the development of this research as the first instance in my practice of employing a performance methodology that

involved meditation and the first to use video documentation shot from a single point of view. The personal experience of performing this simple action was profound. Previously and since I have performed musically before live audiences however there was something deeply rewarding in this elementary encounter with the camera and myself that has been carried over into this research project.

This was a significant encounter with the question of who is the work for? Or are there in fact two works: one for the artist and one for the viewer? The concept of performing alone, with no audience, was an idea that I had been contemplating for some time prior to undertaking this research project. It was largely inspired by my personal research into the Butoh practices of Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno. I was intrigued to learn that it is common practice for Butoh practitioners to perform in the absence of an audience. Toshiharu Kasai, Professor of clinical Psychology at the Sapporo Gakuin University in Japan, describes this concept as ‘un-dance’ (2000). He writes that:

If the value of dance lies in being seen by others, the negation of being seen also starts another un-dance. There are two types of un-seen dance:

1 When there is no audience who sees the performer

And

2 when the movements are not explicit to the outside
but are internal or mental.

The concept of an artwork simultaneously existing as a *seen* and *unseen* entity correlates with the relationship between the solid physical level of reality and the sub-atomic, and the mind – body relationship. This was an important association, which has been extended to incorporate the relationship between live and recorded events, forming the foundation of the enquiry into the relationship between artist and viewer that became a central

aspect of this research project.

The following chapters within this exegesis examine in detail the conceptual and contextual framework for the research project, and describe the breadth of methodological experimentation undertaken towards the final research outcomes.

Chapter 2: the project in context

Identifies writers and artists that have been a source of inspiration and support in defining the key questions and concepts of the research.

Chapter 3: methodologies and processes

Details the strategic approach employed in pursuing the research and traces the development of the research outcomes.

Chapter 4: conclusion

Presents a summary of the research outcomes as they are realised in the examination exhibition and reflects on the project's contribution to the field.

Chapter 2. Project in the field

In this chapter I will discuss the project within the context of visual arts practice and philosophical theory via the following themes:

truth

is it live?

repetition: rhythm and sustain

time as material (recorded time)

artist as material (being in time)

life and art

Truth

Buddhist philosophy and my personal meditation practice form a fundamental context for the development of this research project.

It is important to point out that I am by no means a Buddhist scholar or an advanced meditator, however my practice and research in this field are increasingly informing (or perhaps infiltrating) my art practice in terms of

both conceptual motivation and methodology. The merging of my spiritual/philosophical and creative pursuits will be discussed in greater detail within the methodology and conclusion chapters.

Within this research project the relationship between live and recorded phenomena (and between the artist and the artwork) is explored in relation to the Buddhist doctrine of the two truths, conventional truth and ultimate truth. In his book *The Two Truths Debate* Sonam Thakchoe (2007) describes conventional truth as deceptive and false referring to the illusion that mundane objects are essentially real, while ultimate truth is defined as non-deceptive and relates to the inherently non-existent nature of phenomena. Thakchoe references Guy Newman's useful analogy explaining the coexistence of the two truths:

A table and its emptiness are a single entity. When an ordinary conventional mind takes a table as its object of observation, it sees a table. When a mind of ultimate analysis searches for the table, it finds the emptiness of the table. Hence, the two truths are posited in relation to a single entity by way of the perspectives of the observing consciousness. (2007)

The ultimate truth in Eastern Philosophy is referred to by various terms, the void, nirvana, Tao, Brahman, and is comparable to the quantum theory of the unified field. Theoretical (quantum) physicists would describe a table in much the same way, as existing in two distinct yet unified states:

One in which it appears solid with formal attributes such as colour, shape, density and weight.

And another subatomic state where the table is not solid, consisting of particles that are constantly appearing and disappearing.

Possessing an intellectual understanding of the two truths or the material and sub-atomic levels of reality will not get you very far on the road to

enlightenment as described by S. N. Goenka⁵ (Hart 1987) in his anecdote *The Buddha and the Scientist*. Goenka describes how physicist Donald Arthur Glaser, who won the Nobel Prize in 1960 for his invention the *bubble chamber* used in subatomic particle physics, discovered that in a single second a subatomic particle arises and vanishes 10^{22} times. This is the same discovery made by the Buddha, however when students of Goenka visited the scientist they found that he was ‘still an ordinary person with the usual stock of misery that all ordinary people have...the scientist has not become enlightened because he has not experienced truth directly’.

Professor of psychology and behavioural economics Dan Ariely demonstrates how easy it is to get trapped by illusion in his lecture *Are we in control of our decisions?* (2008) In which he prompted the audience to look at the famous *Shepherd’s Table* illusion. What Ariely points out is that even after we become aware that the tables are the same it’s as though we haven’t learnt anything because we still see the table on the left as being longer than the one on the right.

What this knowledge does provide for this project is an understanding that things are not as they seem or at least that they are simultaneously not as they appear. The quotidian machinations of the conscious mind are not useful in comprehending ultimate reality. It is through meditation that one can directly experience and ultimately transcend the phenomenal impermanence of physical and mental objects.

Thakchoe proposes a significant point in the context of this project that ‘ultimate truth is defined as ‘ultimate’ not because it is absolute or higher than conventional truth, but simply because of its consistent character – its mode of appearance and its mode of being are the same – in contrast with

⁵ Satya Narayan Goenka is the leading ‘lay’ teacher of the Vipassanā meditation technique.

the inconsistent character of conventional truth. Ultimate truth is [defined as] nondeceptive for the same reason.’ (pg.34)

The non-hierarchical position presented by Thakchoe is crucial to the project particularly in regards to the relationship between live events and their documentation. Comparing a reflection of a face in a mirror with the actual face Thakchoe writes that:

We might naïvely assume that because the reflection of a face is not an actual face and does not function as the actual face, it is of lesser importance or significance. But such logic would lead to the converse assumption that the actual face must also be of lesser importance or significance because it is not the reflection of the face, and therefore it does not function as the reflection of the face. The mere fact that the image is not something other than what it is (it is not what it reflects) should not diminish its significance. Understood as a reflection, the mirror image of the face has its own significance and even its own causal effectiveness... moreover for Tsongkhapa⁶ the *causal effectiveness* of a thing is precisely what determines its being true.

This concept provides a fundamental framework for exploring the relationships between a live event, its documentation and the viewer’s live experience of re-presented recording within the project. The work *live recording* (2011) is the most adherent example of this line of investigation. This philosophical standpoint constitutes a contextual foundation for this research project both in terms of the project in the field and the methodology. The dual nature of conventional and ultimate (deceptive - non-deceptive) truth forms the conceptual and strategic starting point for investigating relationships between; live and recorded phenomena, the

⁶ Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) was a Tibetan *Madhyamaka* exegete and founder of the Gelug order.

immanent and transcendent nature of the artist, life and art, the artist and the work, the artist and the viewer, the viewer and the work, the plasticity of real and imagined time. However as described in the introduction the project brings these concerns to a focussed investigation into the plasticity of time and temporal displacement.

Buddhist philosophy, particularly Zen, has been distinctly influential to a number of artists whose practices are contextually relevant to this project. That is not to say that their interest in Buddhism is necessarily the point of relevance but to suggest that the lens of Buddhist thought effects a certain way of viewing and approaching creative practice.

In the foreword to his book *Silence* (1961) John Cage writes ‘What I do, I do not wish blamed on Zen, though without my engagement with Zen (attendance at lectures by Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki, reading of the literature) I doubt whether I would have done what I have done.’

Undoubtedly Cage’s most famous work, *4’33”* first performed in 1952, is a key example of the influence of Zen on his practice. One intention of this work is to bring to the attention of the audience member the ‘music’ of everyday sound and within that Cage’s view that ‘all sounds are excellent’. (1961) Levy writes, the idea that every sound has an ‘infinite value is taken directly from *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on The Transmission of Mind*. “The Dharma is absolutely without distinctions neither high nor low”’. (2006)

Cage was not alone in taking this position however; Pierre Henri founder of the *Musique Concrète* movement for example had been exploring this concept of non-hierarchical sound in music from the 1940s. Henri’s work was focused on writing compositions based on the pure quality of individual sounds, often using found and non-musical sonic elements. What makes

Cage's *4'33"* so significant is that he has removed the composer altogether. This moves beyond highlighting the incidental sound of the room/concert hall, to emphasising the cultural structure of writing and performing music; that is the role of composer, performer, and the relationship between composer/performer and audience. *4'33"* presents the audience member with everything except the composer's musical contrivance, allowing for a self-reflexive awareness of the audience and their role to emerge. The distinction between music and noise and the hierarchy of an object/sound being more significant than another is not inherent in the objects/sounds but is dependent on the viewer's perspective.

Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1964/65) which comprises an eight minute loop of transparent leader film, operates in much the same way as Cage's *4'33"*. Screenings, which have ranged from eight to sixty minutes, present viewers with a film that has no sound or images. All the viewer can see is the light and the dust and scratches on the lens and the leader film. Cage wrote of the work 'An hour long film without images...there is never nothing to see. Here we are both together and separate. My *4'33"* the silent piece is Nam June's *Zen for Film*. The difference is that the film was not silence but something to see' (Levy 2006) Crucially what the viewer has the opportunity of seeing is the mechanism of film and their role in determining their viewing experience.

The role of the viewer is a significant component of this project, a number of works (particularly *sitting with folding time*) aim to evoke in viewers a self-reflexive awareness of the viewing process, extending their perception of 'liveness'.

Is it live?

One of the primary lines of investigation within this project is the relationship between live events and the (re)presentation of documentation. The project proposes that the presentation of documentation particularly in durational forms such as video and sound is a live event, both in terms of the viewer's live encounter with it and the phenomenal quality of the media itself.

From a phenomenal point of view the video and sound documentation presented in this project is live, there is a live continuous signal running between the file storage device to the play back technology where a sequence of live events occur. Bill Viola (1995) explains that

In video, a still image does not exist. The fabric of all video images, moving or still, is the activated, constantly sweeping electron beam⁷ - the steady stream of electrical impulses coming from the camera or video recorder. The divisions into lines and frames are solely divisions in time, the opening and closing of temporal windows... Thus, the video image is a living dynamic energy field, a vibration appearing solid only because it exceeds our ability to discern such fine slices of time.

This is of course a very basic argument for the 'liveness' of documentation within this project. The more compelling attribute of this research is the exploration of the viewer's live encounter with the work. In his essay *On the Performativity of Performance Documentation*, Philip Auslander (2005) writes that 'it may well be that our sense of presence, power, and authenticity derives not from treating the document as an indexical access point to a past

event but from perceiving the document itself as a performance that directly

⁷ In this case Viola is referring to a Cathode Ray Tube monitor.

reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility.'

The relationship between the documentation and the viewer is investigated in this project through experiments that focus on the manipulation and re-presentation of the documentation of live events. The artist's experience of the performances is inaccessible to the audience, whether they view the action live or via documentation. This strategy questions the necessity for an audience to witness the live event of a performance in order to access the work.

Amelia Jones writes that 'while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical "truth" of the performance' (1997). In the case of Tehching Hsieh's practice he did not require or expect the viewer to observe the entire duration of his one-year pieces in order to engage with the work. During the performance of *One Year Performance (cage piece)* (1978-79)⁸ Hsieh did permit limited access for audiences to view the work, what they encountered was Hsieh sitting in the cell, he did not interact with or 'perform' for the audience, although they are not equitable neither a live experience of the work nor an engagement with the documentation provide insight into the immanent experience of the artist.

Hsieh's practice raises the question of whether it is necessary for an audience to witness the live event of a performance to access the work. This question has been investigated throughout the project via the strategy of performing in the absence of an audience. Viewers of the work developed through this project have been denied access to the live events and in the

⁸ For the duration of one year, Hsieh locked himself in an 11'6" × 9' × 8' wooden cage furnished only with a sink, lights, a bucket, and a single bed. During the year, he was not allowed to talk, read, write, listen to the radio, or watch TV. A lawyer notarized the process and ensured the artist never left the cage during the year. A colleague came daily to deliver food, remove the artist's waste, and take a single photograph to document the project.

extreme examples of *contingent requiem* (2013), *sitting with folding time* (2013), and *stornelo* (2013) are presented solely with brief written descriptions of the performances.

Hsieh's *Life Works*, *One Year Performance* (1985-86)⁹ and *Thirteen Year Plan* (1986-99)¹⁰ incorporate a similar method of communicating the work to the viewer. In the absence of evidential documentation the viewer is left to decide for themselves whether the performance. Hsieh's early works; *Cage Piece* (1978-79), *Time Clock Piece* (1980-81), *Outdoors piece* (1981-82), and *Rope Piece* (1982-83) were meticulously documented and accompanied by signed affidavits verifying the authenticity of the performances and documentation. The incredible commitment and endurance required to perform these works leaves little doubt to the authenticity of his later *Life Works*. Marina Abramovic (2009) writes in her letter *When Time Becomes Form* 'He has made more credibility than any living artist I know. And so on that trust you have to trust the rest of it...if Tehching tells me he is doing art but not showing it publicly, I trust him.'

Within this project I cannot assume the same degree of credibility, despite several works displaying 'real-time' video documentation of performed actions. Video can easily be manipulated to deceive the viewer as MTAA demonstrate in their work *1 Year Performance Video* (2004). The work is a remake of Hsieh's *Cage Piece* (1978-79) in which the artists mimic Hsieh's solitary confinement.

Although the artists only recorded a few hours of footage, they have seamlessly stretched the footage to the duration of one year. (Rush 2005) MTAA (2004) write that:

⁹ Hsieh vowed to 'not do art, not talk art, not see art, not read art, not go to art gallery and art museum for one year' (2009)

¹⁰ Hsieh vowed to make art but not show it publicly for thirteen years

When a viewer enters the piece she is presented with side-by-side videos of the artists trapped in identical cell-like rooms. The artists go about the mundane activities possible within a cell: in the morning they wake and breakfast; at around 1PM and 7PM they eat; sometimes they exercise; sometimes they surf the net; sometimes they sit and stare at the wall; they piss; at around midnight, they go to bed.

The viewer is meant to watch this activity for one year.

But, in the work we only mimic endurance; the videos are pre-taped clips edited at runtime via a computer program so that each viewer sees a different sequence. The audience can just close the browser and walk away. No one needs to suffer on this one; failure is built-in at the front end.

Although MTAA acknowledges the deceptive quality of their work it demonstrates how the manipulation of documented material can be used to create the illusion of authenticity. In this respect there is considerable room for the viewer's doubt within this project primarily in regards to the works *contingent requiem* (2013), *sitting with folding time* (2013), and *stornello* (2013). This element of doubt contributes to the projects concern with the viewer's live encounter with the work. To a certain degree the discretion of the viewer determines the nature of the work.

Repetition: rhythm and sustain

Repetition is a key conceptual and formal attribute of this project, in relation to actions performed and their mode of re-presentation. Repetition is employed as a tool for observing relationships of time between past, present, and future.

Deleuze (2004) proposes that repetition 'is not an objective property [that] it is something in the experiencer' He describes it as a conflation of the past into the present consequently generating an 'expectancy'.

Williams presents the following classic examples of expectancy:

David Hume:

The repetition of couples/pairs of events AB AB AB AB AB A, where we come to expect B to follow A.

Henri Bergson:

A clock striking a particular hour, for example 4 o'clock AAAA, where we expect the 4th strike to follow the 3rd.

He explains that their significance in regards to repetition is that since there is no causal relationship between the members of a set, that repetition 'is not a property of the repeated thing... (a particular tick ... does not necessarily cause the next)'. (2003)

Within this project there are two approaches taken to repetition, the first is the repeated performed actions of the artist and the second is the repetition of the recordings. The repetitious actions performed by the artist serve as a tool for quieting the mind resulting in a simultaneous immanence and transcendence of the action. While performing the artist encounters a contraction of experienced time. Deleuze describes this conflation as a 'passive synthesis of time where the past is synthesised, or contracted, in the present as a behaviour towards the future'.

The project endeavours to generate a similar synthesis of past and present within the viewer as they encounter the works. Presenting live durational documentation of a past event several works in this project aim at a conflation of the viewer's present observation of documentation with the understanding that the event itself has fallen away into the past.

The (potentially infinite) repetition of documentation within the installed works relate in part to Deleuze's position that literal repetition is 'radically artificial and, in this sense, in conflict with everything natural, living, changing, and developing.' (Groys 2009)

Albert Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* (1955) is a significant text within this project in relation to the examination and revaluing of repetition, meaning, and time. Camus posits that the fate of Sisyphus (who is condemned to endlessly push a rock to the top of a mountain at which point rolls back down to the plain) correlates to the mundane, absurd existence of the 'workman of today'. Somewhat paradoxically Camus infers that 'one must imagine Sisyphus happy', that despite his predicament Sisyphus is still 'master of his days' and the tragedy of his situation exists only when he is conscious of it.

Camus writes that he's most interested in Sisyphus during his walk back down the mountain, that it is at this point that he becomes aware of his fate. This is when he moves from the immanent state of the struggle - to the transcendent awareness of his condemnation; where he is, why he is there, and the knowledge that he will have to again return to deal with his rock. Camus concludes that it is this very awareness and most importantly the acceptance of his fate that will liberate him. The oscillation, between immanent and transcendent realities described by Camus, is a key concept explored in this project. Although the actions performed within this project do not compare with the struggle of Sisyphus there is a similarly transcendent state that is achieved while the artist is immersed in repetitive activity. The significant distinction in the case of Sisyphus however is that his fate is eternal; his situation is more analogous to an endlessly repeating tape loop.

The conclusion that Camus reaches is reminiscent of the Buddhist philosophy discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that it is through deep awareness of the impermanent nature of reality that one can transcend the mundane. In this regard Sisyphus' repetitive actions are comparable to a mantra or chanting performed as a meditation. Repetition is a core strategy employed as means of approaching transcendence of the mundane while performing actions within this project and is also a key method used within the resolved works to affect the viewer's temporal experience.¹¹

Martin Creed describes rhythm as 'a comfort. It's like putting up a ruler, or a grid, against the world, so that the changing world, as messy as it is, can be made into a pattern... something to hold on to, like a hand rail on the edge of the world'. Repetition and rhythm as a kind of sanctuary is central to the personal motivations driving this research. Within this project repetition in both the actions performed by the artist and as presented in exhibited works

¹¹ Details of specific examples of this are included in the following chapter

serves as an anchor, providing a stable point of departure for the pursuit of transcendence.

Francis Alÿs' work *Song for Lupita* explores the notion of an infinite present displaying a visual paradox that is without beginning or end. The work is an animation that depicts a woman repeatedly pouring water from one glass into another. Alÿs describes the action as 'doing without doing' (TATE 2010). The soundtrack for the animation is a lilting song with the lyrics '*Mañana, mañana*' translated as '*tomorrow, tomorrow*'. Alÿs describes the work as 'a present to be continued'. Boris Groys (2009) relates this work to the notion of non-teleological time:

We are confronted with a pure and repetitive ritual of wasting time - a secular ritual beyond any claim of magical power, beyond any religious tradition or cultural convention. The notion of non- teleological time is explored within this project via repetitive mundane actions that have no historical reference point and as they documentation is presented within the installation context have no narrative beginning or end.

Steve Reich's *Come out* (1966)¹² is a pioneering work that incorporates the delayed repetition of phase shifting to uncanny effect. Reich encountered the phenomenon while using two identical recordings on separate reel-to-reel recorders. One of the recorders played back slightly slower than the other; with a short loop the tracks could be gradually moved out of phase and then back until they return once again in synch. This process of phase shifting two identical recordings results in the playback of every possible relationship between track A and track B. In the liner notes of his album *Early Works*, Reich (1987) discusses the use of recorded speech as source material;

¹² 'The phrase 'come out to show them' was recorded on both channels first in unison, then with channel 2 slowly beginning to move ahead. As the phrase begins to shift, a gradually increasing reverberation is heard which slowly passes into sort of canon or round. Eventually the two voices divide into four and then into eight.' Steve Reich' (Fletchermunsen)

that by not altering its pitch or timbre, one keeps the original emotional power that speech has while intensifying its melody and meaning through repetition and rhythm.¹³

The effect on the listener of the repetition and phasing in this work verges on the hypnotic. My encounter with this work¹⁴ several years ago revealed the mesmerizing and powerful potential that simple modes of repetition and rhythmic relationship have in affecting audiences.

Time as Material

It is not the monitor, or the camera, or the tape, that is the basic material of video, but time itself.

Bill Viola

Time is the primary material of this research project. It is a dimension that is experienced (in 'real' time), recorded, manipulated and re-presented. The manipulation and re-presentation of time is a key strategy within this project to explore and reveal temporal plasticity and approach a synthesis of live and recorded experience.

Christian Marclay's *Tape Fall* (1989) embodies such a synthesis. In this work Marclay presents us with a recording that in its re-presentation mimics the originary event. From high on a stepladder magnetic tape is played through a reel-to-reel recorder. The tape contains an audio recording of a waterfall that manifests the physical nature of that waterfall as the tape slowly 'falls' to

¹³ The voice in this recording is that of Danniel Hamm explaining how he had to "open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them." Composer Steve Reich made this recording of, then 19-year-old, Hamm explaining how he had to convince the police to take him to the hospital during the 1964 Harlem riots. The police were only attending to the wounded that were visibly bleeding so Hamm opened his bruises to be taken to the hospital.' (Fletchermunsen)

¹⁴ Including several similar works such as: *Clapping Music* (1972), *It's Gonna Rain* (1965)

the gallery floor. Jennifer González (2005) describes *Tape Fall* as 'strangely mesmerising, the slow coiling of shimmering tape on the ground and the gentle sound of water flowing transfers the machine into a contemplative object whose referent - the waterfall - seems materially present, like a physical onomatopoeia.'

The notion of the synthesis of recording and re-presentation evident in this work is a key driver for this project. This is particularly evident in the work *live recording*, whereby the recording has been made in order to produce a physical manifestation within an installation context.

The minimal aesthetic and simplicity of the composition of *Tape Fall* is synonymous with my approach to developing the sculptures and installations within this project. The speculative work *bubble and squeak* (2012) developed at an early stage of the project, incorporates reel-to-reel tape recorders and a similar falling and accumulation of magnetic tape on the floor. Curiously I was unaware of Marclay's *Tape Fall* at the time, my interest in using magnetic tape involved exploring its physical material quality; the uncanny sensation of observing linear time as it is objectively recorded while experiencing the subjective being in time as it passes.

There is a similar oscillation between observing and being in time experienced by viewers of Marclay's *The Clock* (2012). The 24-hour work is essentially a clock, a montage comprised of thousands of sampled clips from cinema history of scenes that reveal a timepiece of some kind accurately tracing the passing of time. *The Clock* simultaneously displays a reflexive durational reference to the work itself and the correct time of the outside world of the viewer. However via the narrative fragments of the sampled clips and Marclay's extreme attention to detail in editing, especially in regards to the soundtrack, the viewer's sense of time is suspended.

This suspension of experienced time is also evident in Marclay's earlier work *Telephone* (1995), however in this case it is achieved through repetition. A similar process of sampling and editing clips from cinema is employed to create a montage with the extremely basic narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end. However each of these sections is extended through repetition, in the first instance one clip of an actor/character answering a phone is followed by another and another. It is akin to a record or CD skipping, each new person answering the phone refreshes the moment. These clips slowly extend to become a series of scenes that involve the actor/character quietly listening to the caller, then progress towards the logical conclusion of a sequence of scenes of ending the call and hanging up. The use of repetition is a key strategy for manipulating the experience of time within this research project. It is employed as a mechanism for suspending and or extending the encountered present in terms of the artist's observation of duration through repeated action and the viewer's experience of time through repetitious replay of recordings.

Douglas Gordon is another artist who explores temporal disruption through the manipulation of film and video. His work *24hr Psycho* (1993) prolongs the well-known narrative of Hitchcock's *Psycho* beyond comprehension. The work moves so slowly that the inherent causality of the narrative, the sequence of events, is effectively destroyed. Although the film is present in its entirety the relatively simple act of extending its duration dramatically disturbs the viewer's conventional cinematic experience, the viewer is forced into an unfamiliar temporal arena.

Gordon employs a similar strategy in the work *5 Year Drive By* (1995) however in this case rather than imposing an narratively unrelated duration he extends the running time of the film to coincide with the narrative

timeframe of 3 years, transposing the fictitious timeline to ‘real’ time. The information-preserving transformation that Gordon implements in producing these works directly corresponds to methodological strategies applied in the development of this project. It is particularly evident in the work *folding time* (2012), however in this case the work is produced through a process that contracts rather than extends time. An important distinction to make in the context of this project is that the artist’s experience and method of applying this strategy is an integral component of the work¹⁵.

Daniel Crooks is artist who explores techniques of video manipulation that are designed to evoke a re-interpretation of the viewer’s temporal awareness. His *Intersection* series is particularly relevant to this research project as the source material for each of the works is identical. Crooks employs a range of re-presentation modes exploring the use of advanced technology as a tool for the re-interpretation of our mundane reality. There is a significant distinction between Crooks approach and the strategies of this project relate to the level of technology involved in the manipulation. Crooks uses specialised software ‘to take the perfect precision of the computer-based world and to impose that on a reality that is unpredictable, imprecise and otherwise difficult to control.’ (AGSA, 2008)

The slick aesthetic quality of Crooks’ work, often described as mesmerising, is a central motivation for his methodology. This is a significant distinction in regard to works developed within this project, such as *where is history?* and *folding time* that involve a similar process of manipulation and re-presentation of durational material. The methodology employed to develop these works is focussed on the process and the resulting shift in perception rather than the aesthetic outcome.

¹⁵ This process is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3 Methodology

A direct contextual reference for the work *where is history?* is the series of photographed books by Idris Kahn¹⁶. The work *Every page of the Holy Quran* (2004) involved photographing each page of the text and layering the photographs into a single image. This methodology corresponds to the process of photocopying an entire text in the work *where is history?*. The crucial distinction is that Kahn uses Photoshop to manipulate the opacity and contrast of individual layers to produce a desired aesthetic outcome, whereas the process of photocopying an entire text was conducted with no preconception of the aesthetic outcome.¹⁷

The contextual examples described above relate to the aspect of this project that involves the manipulation of recorded information to explore temporal plasticity in time-based practice. This project is also concerned with the indeterminacy and mutability of time as it is phenomenally experienced.

Artist as material: Being in time

Art is one way to live, an energy or power that gives you a way to be
Tehching Hsieh

In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist discussing the documentation of his work, Hsieh states that 'the artwork and the document are not equivalent.' He explains that the work is the experience, his experience, and that this 'cannot be shared' with an audience, 'but the audience can use their own experience to imagine and to think about the work.' (Orrell, 2010)

¹⁶ As in the case of Christian Marclay's *Tape Fall*, I was unaware of Kahn's series of photographed books prior to developing the work *where is history?*

¹⁷ This is discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter.

The artist's experience while performing actions and throughout the creative process is a central investigation of this research project. It is a phenomenon that is not directly accessible to the viewer whether they witness a live event or its documentation. It raises the questions: Which of an artist's actions and experiences constitute art? Where is the boundary between an artist's life and their art?

Since 1995 Song Dong has maintained the daily practice of writing a diary with water on a stone, as he writes the entries evaporate. This ephemeral journal contradicts the typical purpose of keeping a diary as a personal record that traces an individual's life, an archive that can be retrospectively accessed to evaluate personal development.

Historically diaries have been a valuable resource used to gain insight into the personal thoughts and experiences of notable figures. Song Dong is decidedly wary of this phenomenon: 'You might not think about this generally but during the diary writing process consider that someone else might be reading this someday. Since considering this I stopped writing a traditional diary'. (APT 2002)

Song Dong considers that the true nature of a diary is for personal reflection not as an historical document. His practice of writing with water is more akin to a meditation that involves a process of forgetting over remembering. By exhibiting documentation of the action of writing his diary (*Writing Diary with Water* 1995 -) as a work of art Dong presents an intriguing paradox, highlighting the ephemeral nature of all things while alluding to the human desire and attempts to preserve moments of time.

Dong's ritualised engagement with the self-reflexive activity of writing his water diary effectuates a personal psychological benefit, 'After a while this stone slowly became a part of me. That means I could say anything to it and be unscrupulous. This act became a part of life and it made me more relaxed.' (APT 2002) In this way, through the conflation of life and art, a feedback loop is generated between the artist's personal and professional lives. This relationship between the artist's personal and creative motivations is a significant concern investigated through this research.

Several works by Song Dong examine the relationship between the artist's experience of being in time and the documentation of time. His work *Stamping the Water* (1996) includes a series of still images that document an action he performed whereby he repeatedly stamped the water flowing down the Lhasa River in Tibet with a wooden seal carved with the character for water. This action refers to the absurdity of retaining attachment to phenomena that are inherently impermanent. Through the performance of this action Dong was able to directly experience the passing of time fully aware that each stamp immediately dissolves and literally passes away. The futility of the action would be comprehensively realised. Presenting still images of this action along with the wooden seal constitutes a paradox that contradicts the notion of impermanence at the heart of the work. The documents serve as an indexical record of an ephemeral event, however as the performance demonstrates all things are impermanent including the ostensibly static photographic record

Dong's series of works *Writing the time with Water – (New York, Venice, London, Singapore, Kwangju (2005-))* involves the artist 'recording' time by writing the time with water and a brush. As in *Writing Diary with Water*¹⁸ the record evaporates. This work embodies a synthesis of experienced and

¹⁸ This work is discussed in the following section

recorded duration with impermanence again as a central theme. Inherent in these works is a division between the artist's experience and that of the viewer. Although Dong performed this series of works in public spaces there is not a sense that he is performing for an audience.

Much of Dong's practice incorporates prolonged or ritualised repetitive actions (such as *Stamping the Water* (1996) *Writing Diary with Water* (1995-) and it is within these meditative processes that the potency of the action is manifest. The viewer or passer by of *Writing the time with Water* cannot directly access the effect the performance has on the artist. What they can access is the compelling conceptual motivation for performing such an action and can share the experience of witnessing the literal evaporation of time. The relationship between the experience of the artist and that of the viewer is markedly skewed. Within the context of this project the relationship between the artist's and viewer's experience of the work is a pivotal concern. Much of Dong's work especially *Writing Diary with Water* (1995-) evokes the question who is the work for?

Life and Art

What happened for some of us was that our newly released art began to perform itself as if following its own natural bent. It may have occurred to us that we might live our lives in the same way.

Alan Kaprow (1983)

A key investigation of this project is the relationship between the artist's experience while performing actions and the desire to communicate that experience to the viewer. Several works explore the concept of art practice as a site for both personal and professional experimentation in a way that the creative process becomes a kind of sanctuary.

The life work of Bas Jan Ader is one of the most poignant examples of the unification of personal and creative endeavour relevant to this project. Ader inadvertently fulfilled the supreme union of life and art, infamously disappearing (presumed dead) while in the process of performing *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975).

Within the context of this project Ader's *I'm too sad to tell you*, (1971) is particularly significant. The work, which has been presented as both a 16mm film and a single photograph, depicts Ader crying, however there is no indication as to cause of his sorrow. The title of the work reinforces the viewer's restricted access to the personal experience of the artist, affirming that he will not or cannot share his story with the viewer. Jan Verwoert (2006) writes of the 16mm version that:

Despite its intensity, however, the crying does not seem like a sudden outburst. There is no dramatic build-up or climactic moment of release. Ader just cries. What he displays is not a momentary stir of emotion, but an elementary emotional state of grief...by exhibiting it as a state or condition without a story, Ader isolates sadness as an idea.

Ader's psychological condition has been removed from his biographical narrative through the documentation process and is presented as an isolated moment of sorrow. There is an implied historical cause for Ader's emotional state, however it has been withheld from viewers. The paradox of revealing

yet concealing personal experience through artworks is an important line of enquiry investigated within this project. Several of the research outcomes of the project investigate the relationship between the artist and the viewer by providing varying degrees of access to the personal experiences of the artist.

With the exception of the work *good time – bad time* (2013) the experiences that are shared with the viewer within this project do not pertain to events from the artist's personal historical narrative.

They are the immanent experiences of performing the actions that are subsequently (re)presented through documentation within the context of the installed works. The focus on the experiences of conducting the actions within this project explores the potential for artistic endeavour to serve as a way of being, as a process for observing and extending the self.

Agnes Martin famously stated that she 'paints with her back to the world' in this regard the act of painting becomes a sanctuary. (Blake 2010) Martin lived for several years in relative solitude in the desert of New Mexico where she said she 'became as wise as a Chinese Hermit'. (Levy pg. 154) It was Martin's belief that solitude is essential 'To discover the conscious mind in a world where intellect is held to be valuable'. She goes on to suggest that 'people who like to be alone, who walk alone will perhaps be serious workers in the art field. (Martin 2005)

The methodological strategy employed in this research of performing in isolation (detailed in the following chapter) explores the notion of the sanctuary of solitude. While performing actions within this project, there is nothing else, no thought of anything outside the observation of the event at hand.

Chapter 2. Methodologies and Processes

In this chapter I will discuss the methods and materials implemented in the development of this research and how they embody the themes of the project. This is followed by detailed descriptions of individual works and how their development informed and defined the research outcomes. As the conceptual motivation for this research is inextricably linked to process and strategies for developing work, the implemented methodology is a central component of the project.

As this research explores themes related to the (re)presentation of documented actions within the gallery context the decision was made at the commencement of the project to schedule several exhibitions throughout the candidature. As the project developed, additional opportunities to exhibit arose resulting in work being presented in eight exhibitions in total¹⁹. Presenting speculative and resolved work within a variety of gallery contexts was a crucial strategy for exploring methods of (re)presenting documentation of events and actions, particularly in regards to the viewer's experience of the work. Each exhibited work was treated as an ephemeral installation, existing in a live relationship between the viewer and the work for the duration of the exhibition. This strategy provided essential feedback from audiences and gallery staff along with the opportunity for me to contemplate the work from the viewer's perspective.

¹⁹ List of exhibitions: 2011: *Best Show*, FELTspace, Adelaide, *live recording*, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston. 2012: *Still*, (collaboration with Matt Warren) Queenstown Heritage and Arts Festival, Queenstown, *Appearing as Process*, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston, *In a Silent Way*, CAST, Hobart, *North by North*, Moonah Arts Centre, Hobart, *closure loops*, (collaboration with Laura Hindmarsh) Long Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart. 2013: *Testing Ground*, Ten Days on the Island Festival, Salamanca Arts Centre.

From the outset of the project it was important to make conscious distinctions between various stages of the creative process that are described as:

the idea

the script

the direction

the action

the documentation

the object / artefact outcome

the presentation

and reflection

Identifying these elements as discrete processes has been a strategy for examining the shifting line between the artist's personal and artistic motivations. Maintaining an awareness of each of these components and the relationship between them has been instrumental in how the project has been framed and pursued.

A number of early works such as *greatest sculpture* (2011) and *bubble and squeak* (2012) were undermined by a lack of clarity in regards to the relationship between these processes.

Ideas:

Ideas can and do surface at any time; during day to day life, while meditating, in a waking half sleep or in some cases while affected by fever. Ideas for work may emerge as a fragment, as a complete work, or more commonly as a pair or cluster of concepts. Once an idea emerges it may lay dormant in the back of my mind for months or even years before being developed or realised. Several of the works within this research project have evolved through this process; works such as *never ending sculpture* (2013) and *contingent*

requiem (2013) have been literally floating in my mind from the beginning of this project. Processing ideas in the subconscious mind allows for the intuitive realisation for the ‘right’ time and circumstances for ideas to emerge and be developed.

David Lynch discusses his relationship with ideas and particularly the influence that his meditation practice has on his ability to subconsciously ‘fish’ for ideas in his book *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity* (2006). For Lynch ideas emerge as fragments and he writes that:

It would be great if the entire film came all at once. But it comes, for me, in fragments. That first fragment is like the Rosetta Stone. It’s the piece of the puzzle that indicates the rest...In *Blue Velvet*, it was red lips, green lawns, and the song—Bobby Vinton’s version of “Blue Velvet.” The next thing was an ear lying in a field. And that was it. (2006)

Listening to the audio version of this book read by Lynch himself was immensely beneficial and reassuring particularly in terms of preserving faith in my methodology and trusting in the idea.

Scripts:

Within this project the ‘script’ is literally nothing more than the assertion of what the action is, implemented as a strategy for delineating the action without describing how or where it should be conducted²⁰. This approach proved useful in maintaining an objective distance while performing, as though someone else had written the script. The function of the script within

²⁰ The *how* and *where* are part of the process of ‘directing’ the action.

this project has been to facilitate an unmitigated surrender to the action, facilitating the integration of the artist and the work.

The use of scripts as a methodology was influenced by the minimal almost austere nature of certain Fluxus performance scores that exist as autonomous entities as they move through time; the performances may vary wildly yet the score remains unchanged.

Listed below are examples of this method of scripting used within the project accompanying the titles of their related works:

where is history?:

Copy each page of a book (E.H. Carr's *What is History?*) onto one A4 page.

never-ending sculpture: action 1

Insert an updated artist statement into each catalogue (for the exhibition *Testing Ground*)

good time, bad time

Recall and vocalise your saddest memory and record it on tape.

Listen to the recording and simultaneously erase the tape.

Recall and vocalise your happiest memory and record it on tape.

Listen to the recording and simultaneously duplicate the tape.

Direction:

The direction determines the location of the action, how it should be approached and enacted and how the action will be recorded (camera angles, lighting etc.) Decisions around how to frame and light the actions throughout the project were relatively pragmatic. Typically the camera was positioned at approximately 150cm from the floor (the gallery standard for hanging work) a strategy determined in part as an attempt to mimic the point of view of a single generic viewer. It was important for the documentation to be viewed from a generic audience perspective rather than through contrivances such as overhead shots or extreme close-up. Similarly

no deliberate decisions were made with regard to clothing, actions were performed with whatever clothes I happened to be wearing at the time. The performed²¹ actions within this project are not feigned ‘performances’ in the sense of being staged for the audience. The decision to avoid the use of costume and cinematic devices relates to exploring the integration of art and life as experienced by the artist and as perceived by the viewer within the gallery context.

Action:

Through the development of the script and the determination of how the action will be conducted and documented the action can be performed without distraction. My prior experience of performing to the camera has resulted in the propensity to ignore the presence of the camera. Maintaining a concentrated meditative state while performing has been essential in order to observe the effect that performing the actions imparts on my temporal perception. It has been crucial regardless of the mundane or inane nature of the actions within this project to remain immanently engaged mentally and physically. This is significant in exploring the idea of the artist not *performing* an action but *being* the action. This was evidently not the case in the work *where is history?* as the action is interrupted by the presence of other people in the space. This work is an anomaly within the context of the project as the action was intended to be performed publicly, shared with others as a live exchange, whereas all other actions were performed in isolation.

All of the actions conducted in this project are performed and documented in a single take, there were no rehearsals nor was there any re-shooting of an action. This is vital not only in terms of authenticity and the idea of a

²¹ The terms ‘perform’ and ‘performed’ in the context of this project are used in reference to the notion of accomplishing or carrying out a task.

singular unrepeatable event, but also essential in establishing the desired cognitive state while performing.

Absolute clarity and emptiness of mind has been the critical state for performing the actions in this research project. From a personal perspective this approach functioned as an extension of my meditation practice, providing avenues for deep insight into the impermanent nature of phenomena. In order to effectively observe impermanence while performing the actions within this project the mind must be concentrated and free from all distracting thought.

Any reflexive thought entering the mind relating to an outcome or how the resulting documentation may be received by viewers generates a palpable phenomenological shift from an immanent sense of being in time in the action to a critical self-conscious perspective.

Documentation:

All video documentation has been made using a standard 'consumer level' Canon HV30 camcorder recording onto Sony (63) mini DV Digital HD videotape. The decision to always use the same equipment not only provides a level of continuity but also removes unnecessary decision making from the process. The strategy of using readily accessible and affordable technology is intended to avoid a hierarchical divide between the technological ability and resources of the artist and that of the viewer.

The resolved installations developed through this project incorporate and present the documentation of the performed actions via a range of media including: video projection, CRT monitors, LCD monitors, stereo headphones, amplified audio, hand-held tablet computer, and text. The breadth of media employed in the final exhibition outcome endeavours to

evoke in the viewer an awareness of the effect that various media has on the reception and interpretation of time-based practice.

Object/artefact:

The creation of an object or artefact as an outcome of the actions performed is a relatively complex aspect of this project. In the case of a work such as *where is history?* the artefact is apparent, however as a major component of this research relates to the artist's experience and regarding the artist as material, the 'artefact' is often less discernible. Several actions conducted as part of *never-ending sculpture* explore this issue. *action 5: mind as material (text) {01:32:34}* is a notable example where the action comprises the artist reading a text with the expectation that it will positively influence the artist's world view. In this case the direct effect of the action remains within the artist, the action has resulted in a subtle cognitive reconfiguration that is not directly accessible to the viewer. Positioning the affect that actions have on the artist as a major component of the work correlates to the *Life Works* of Tehching Hsieh²².

(re)presentation:

Strategies for the manipulation and re-presentation of documentation within this project are diverse and are detailed in the descriptions of each work below. The development of installations for exhibition constitutes the reintegration of the elements of the methodology outlined above. This process was most successful when the resolved work and the initial idea were synchronised; where the creation of the installation were retrospectively driven by the idea. Conversely several works were complicated by concern with how the work might be received by the viewer. This became evident in early works such as *bubble and squeak* (2012) and *closure loops* (2012). Ironically these works, primarily focused on viewer

²² As described in chapter 2.

experience, were the least well received by audiences. Reflecting on the early works developed in this project I discerned that consciously focusing on specific outcomes, particularly imagined viewer expectations, circumvented my intuitive processes; this realisation reaffirmed the process of developing ideas as they instinctively arise.

Reflection:

The reflection stage of the methodology relates to the artist's encounter with the recorded events as they manifest in exhibited works. It is at this point that artist's memory of the action merges with the viewing of re-presented documentation. The single point of view established in the documentation provides the artist with the same vantage as the viewer. Contemplating the documentation of actions from the position of the viewer extends the exploration of the conflation of past, present, and future.

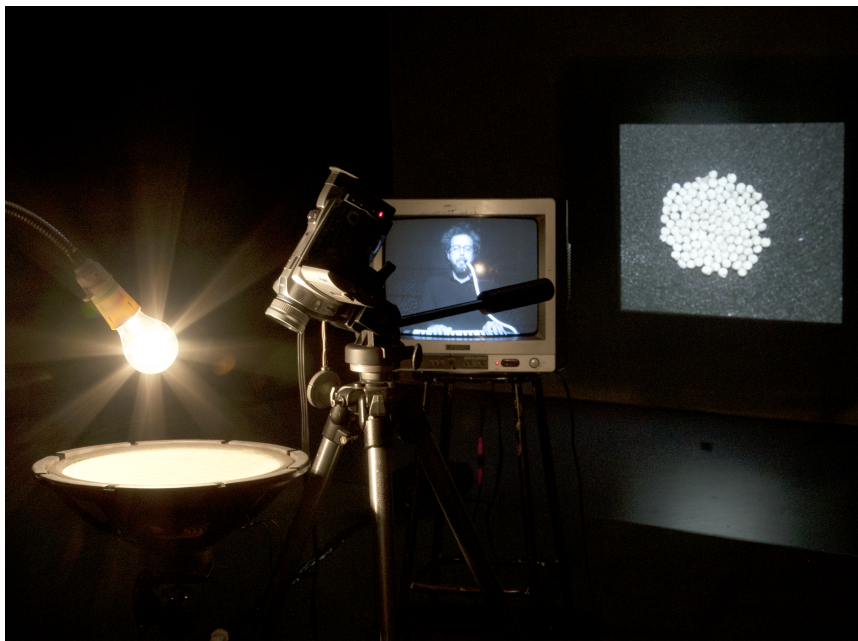


Fig. 4
Darren Cook, *live recording*, 2011 (installation view)
2-channel video, mono audio, 57min (loop), mixed media installation, dimensions variable.

live recording (2011)

This piece was developed quite early in the project and has persisted as a pivotal work throughout as it incorporates all the key investigations of the research. The work was first exhibited in the new media gallery at Sawtooth ARI in Launceston in 2011 and subsequently presented in Hobart at the Long Gallery Salamanca in 2012. Exhibiting the work in two contrasting gallery contexts was beneficial in terms of refining the work.

Initial studio experiments involved investigating the phenomenon of cymatics²³ as a potential method for representing the transmission of past events (through memory) to the present. This was based on the desire to examine causal relationships particularly those associated with emotional and psychological well-being. Events from the past, which no longer exist, have the potential to affect our present psychological and physiological state via memory²⁴.

The recurrence of memory produces a synthesis of the past and present similar to the synthesis of time described by Deleuze, whereby an individual could be said to be experiencing the past and present simultaneously. My personal investment in this work emerges from my experience of prolonged periods of persistently recurring memories and thoughts. I have found meditation to be effective in not only coping with the phenomenon but also in stemming the flow. This personal experience is a motivating factor behind the work however it is important to point out that it is not the intended subject of the work. The primary aim of the work was to explore the concept of a 'live' recording.

The first stage of the development of this work was to perform a sonic action that could be recorded and (re)presented. In order to focus on the

²³ Cymatics from Greek: κύμα "wave") is the study of visible sound and vibration, a subset of modal phenomena.

²⁴ This is most dramatically evident among sufferers of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

mechanism of causality through the transmission of information from past to present and future rather than specific memories and the role they have played within my own personal narrative the action needed to be as simple and impersonal as possible. As one of the primary aims of meditation is to develop a clear and balanced mental state in order to observe (and ultimately transcend) the phenomenal level of reality I started thinking of ways to generate sound while in a meditative state.

This is the reason behind using a melodica to produce the sonic element as I could 'play' the instrument with very little or no movement and that my exhaled breath would produce the tone almost incidentally. This was important in regards to remaining in the meditation; my focus was on the breath not on the idea of playing the instrument. The action was performed for one hour, this is both the duration of the videotape and the usual length of time I spend meditating. It was important for the duration to be lengthy enough to go into a deep meditation; I could have recorded for two minutes and looped the video but I feel that the commitment to the action no matter how monotonous is crucial.

It was during this action that the inaccessibility of the artist's experience became profoundly apparent. Performing the action was a remarkable experience particularly in terms of the perception of time. I was simultaneously aware of the passing of time in terms of the total duration of the action and experiencing time as a sequence of present moments as I focused on each inward and outward breath. The documentation of this continuous present subsequently becomes a recording of a past event; incorporated into the installation it becomes a synthesis of the past and present and simulates the cognitive state of the artist.

Within the exhibited installation the audio from this recording is amplified through a single speaker containing a small number of seeds. The seeds vibrate with each breath; this physical phenomenon is subsequently projected on the gallery wall via a live video feed.

The chord played on the melodica is of no particular significance beside the fact that it was one of the lowest chords possible²⁵. Due to the limited frequency range of the melodica it became necessary to play the (recorded) audio at an almost unbearable volume in order to create the desired cymatic effect. It was evident from early experiments that the amplified recording would need to be loud but it was uncertain how forceful this would be in the gallery context. The volume further emphasised the notion of the live reality of the documentation. The physical presence of the sound is almost unbearably evident; the viewer becomes aware of being physically affected just as the seeds are.

This work progressed from early experiments to a resolved work relatively quickly, induced by a last minute offer to exhibit at Sawtooth ARI. The work had not been set up prior to installing in the gallery space, however it came together intuitively. This was an instance of the idea driving the installation of the work. The process of installing the work was like an improvised performance and was similar to the documented performance in terms of the concentrated cognitive state of the artist.

My personal meditation practice and experience as an artist have enabled me to rapidly attain a quietened state of mind allowing subconscious processes to emerge. This enables a psychological state analogous with the state of mind through which the original idea surfaced. In this case there was

²⁵ Low frequency sound waves are more effective in producing cymatic effects.

an acute sense of being a passive observer as the work came into being of its own accord. This realisation and the personal experience of performing the initial action lead me to question: Whom am I performing for? Am I performing for myself or for the purposes of creating artwork?²⁶

The causal mechanisms and the conflation of past, present, and future present in this work could have potentially been produced through the repeated replay of almost any recorded audio. Performing the action myself was a strategy that attempted to align or unify the mental and physical state of the artist with the mechanisms of the audio-video installation. The CRT monitor used in the final installation symbolically embodies the artist alluding to the illusion that the performer is actually present within the monitor rather than merely appearing as an image. This is enhanced by the powerful presence of the repeated chord.



²⁶ This inquiry continued throughout the research and is discussed in the following chapter.

Fig.5

Darren Cook, *where is history?* 2012 (video still)

Single channel video, 51 min (loop), mixed media installation, dimensions variable

where is history? (2012)

My diverse investigations into information-preserving transformation as a process for exploring the relationship between live and recorded events, prompted me to ask a very simple question: *What would happen if you attempted to photocopy an entire book onto a single page?*

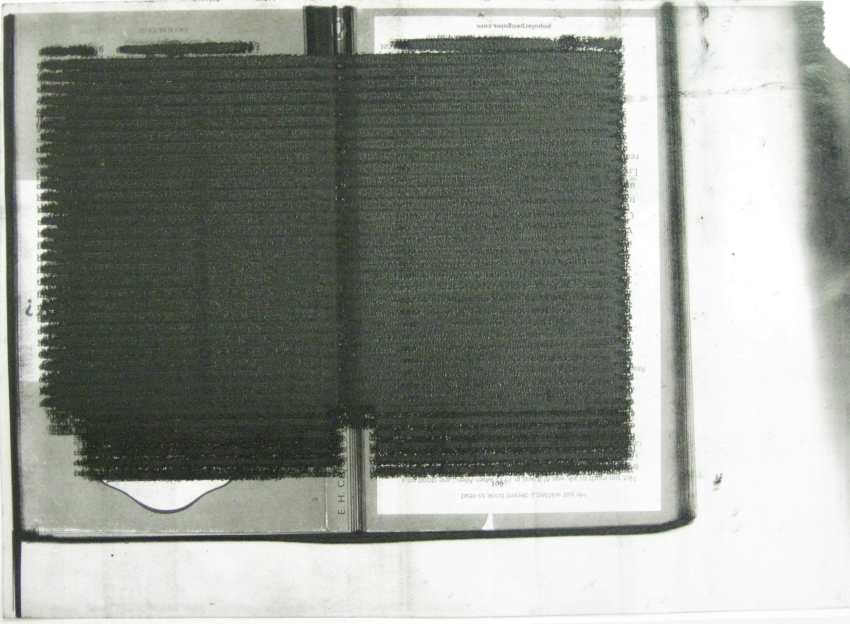
The text I selected was E. H. Carr's *What is History?*, a decision based on the author Carr's rejection of the view that an objective account of history can be made on the basis of empirical facts. The process of repeated photocopying onto the same page employed in this work renders the book illegible, despite the physical presence (albeit in another form) of the entire text.

Preliminary studio experiments produced aesthetically satisfying results, however through these early tests I became increasingly interested in exploring the mundane repetitive process of the prolonged photocopying as performance. Presenting the performance element of the work activates the artefact's direct relationship to lived experience.

The performance took place at Sawtooth ARI, Launceston as part of the closing event of the exhibition *Appearing as Process*. Boni Cairncross, another exhibiting artist who had travelled from Sydney, was also performing as part of the event that was scheduled on the 29th of September 2012. Unwittingly the curator had programmed the event on AFL Grand Final Day and as a consequence nobody turned up. This was the first (and only) work I had determined to perform to a live audience, the decision to perform to a live audience came at a point in the research where I was

focused on the idea that viewing a performance live does not necessarily provide a more authentic point of access for the viewer.²⁷

The idea to perform this action live was in opposition to the prescribed



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soothing and through the repetitious actions I ironically entered an almost blissfully concentrated state of mind. Once again my lived experience of performing the action emerged as a significant component of the work however it remained inaccessible to viewers in the final installation.

²⁷ I have performed musically for live audiences on numerous occasions and the greatest difficulty is dealing with the nervous energy, professional musicians such as concert pianists take beta blockers (a class of drugs that suppress the effect of adrenalin and other stress hormones) before performances. Even though the action itself was uncomplicated and intended to be monotonous I had built up the usual nervous tension, and discovering that no audience had nor likely would arrive was somewhat of a relief. Although intended for a live audience I conducted the performance nevertheless.

Fig. 6
Darren Cook
where is history? 2012 (detail)
Single channel video, 51 min (loop), mixed media installation, dimensions variable



Fig. 7
Darren Cook
folding time 2013
5 channel sound installation
Stereo, duration and dimensions variable

folding time

This work embodies an extension of a process included as part of my honours research project, that I have continued to explore in my recent practice. Each of the works *crude awakening* (2009) and *born again* (2010) were developed through this process of 'removing' time from time-based media. *folding time* is unique within this project, as the role of the artist in performing an action is not directly integrated as an element of the installed work.

The process involves using the audio software *Ableton Live* to dissect an audio file and place the segments onto individual tracks so as to enable them to be played back in unison. In the case of *folding time* the original track has been processed through a series of bifurcations or folds. The first stage was to 'cut' the track in half with the second half placed on a separate track and reversed to simulate folding the track in half. The result of this first stage is

that the piece of music is heard simultaneously playing from the beginning and the end towards a new 'end-point' in the middle. This process was then repeated with the second 'fold' resulting in four tracks with a quarter of the original on each, the subsequent 'fold' resulted in eight tracks and so on, towards the point where the entire original piece is played in the fraction of a second and is heard as a single tone. At each stage of this process the information is identical, however the sound heard by the listener is dramatically transformed.

The methodology of 'removing' the space between information corresponds to the process applied in the work *where is history?*. In the case of *Ableton Live*, with each 'fold' the temporal spaces between the notes are filled until no discernible spaces remain, echoing how each photocopy in *where is history?* prints another layer of text adding to the eventual black mass. There is also a correlation between the mundane repetitive action of the photocopying and the process of cutting and repositioning the tracks. Although the latest digital software was used to produce this work the process was painstaking as the process of measuring, cutting and repositioning segments of the track, were by no means automated.²⁸

The result of this methodology is the transformation of what is arguably a beautifully resolved piece of music into a series of harsh repetitive noises, and finally to relatively unendurable tone. Whilst all the components of the 'music' itself are present the viewer listens to the same piece of music with varying amounts of time (the space between) 'removed', dramatically disrupting the harmonious and rhythmic relationships.

²⁸ If I were to develop this work using analogue audiotape the process of measuring and cutting would be comparable. What the digital technology does provide is the ability to easily combine and play back the individual tracks simultaneously.



Fig. 8
 Darren Cook
never ending sculpture 2013 (video still)
 Single channel video, > 5hrs: 21mins: 21secs (loop)
 Dimensions variable

never-ending sculpture project (2013)

The initial motivation for *never-ending sculpture project* was to create a sculpture that is not seen or exhibited in physical form as it is designed never to reach a point of resolution. Instead the perpetual creation, and or destruction of the physical structures, would be documented via video and sound and compiled in a durational recording that would continue to lengthen interminably. Through this strategy time and the artist's experience would become the primary materials of the work. The exhibition of this documentation would then exist simultaneously as a work in itself and as a record of predominantly *non-productive* creative labour.

The principle motivation behind this approach was the desire to create a work that is *life-like* i.e. a work that embodies and demonstrates the

fundamental impermanent quality of all things.²⁹ The strategy to solely present the video of an unending process was designed to explore the limits of (re)presentation, with a view to investigating the gulf between an artist's experience of creating a work and the viewer's ability to access and share that experience.

The single point of view that a camera provides not only frames (and thus limits) the viewer's access to the object/event, as a two dimensional translation device, it also defeats the three-dimensional quality of the sculpture. The process of continually adding to the video documentation was designed to further disrupt the viewer's access as the duration extends indefinitely beyond several hours. Paradoxically as more information is provided, the work becomes increasingly difficult to view thereby simulating the photocopying process in *where is history?* However in the context of *never-ending sculpture* the effect is manifest through interminable extension as opposed to the contraction of a linear format.

The opportunity to develop *never-ending sculpture project* came when I was approached to participate in the exhibition *Testing Ground* curated by Julie Gough, for the Ten Days on the Island Festival (2013). The curatorial premise for the exhibition focused on experimentation and the proposition of artists testing themselves and audience expectation. *Testing Ground* offered ideal conditions for the development of this work as the premise, to present a work in perpetual progress, was encouraged and supported within the curatorial context.

In response to the *Ten Days on the Island* festival title I decided to conduct ten nights of sculptural actions in the gallery while it was closed. This was in

²⁹ *never-ending sculpture project* was also designed as a structure that I (as the artist) can inhabit to conduct experiments, this resulted in the creation of discrete works that simultaneously exist within *never-ending sculpture* and as autonomous works.

part a reference to the idea that artists are always 'at work' and that often the work artists do is unseen and not necessarily evident in exhibited outcomes. Subsequent to each nocturnal event video documentation was to be presented as part of an installation that included the physical object veiled with a canvas drop sheet. At the time I intended to create a tension between the viewer and an object that they were prevented from accessing; an idea that extended the strategy of denying the viewer access to the live event of the actions.

On discussing the proposal to include a veiled physical structure with my colleagues and supervisors it became clear that it would likely undermine the function and role of the video documentation. The decision to remove the physical traces of each of the actions from the gallery space proved to be crucial in terms of how the work progressed. The direct impact of this decision was to prompt me to focus on experimentation with the intangible materials of time and mind, through the experience of the artist.

There were several additional ideas for methods of facilitating the viewer's access, such as installing a signal switcher so that viewer's could navigate from one action to another. Once again this contradicted the underlying premise of the work concerned with the concealing nature of reproduction and documentation.

Prior to the opening of the exhibition the project continued to shift, for first example the point made in my artist statement for the exhibition catalogue where I had written 'the unfinished sculpture will be veiled and remain in the space'. The catalogue had already gone to print when I made the decision not to leave any physical trace of the actions³⁰. In response I determined that

³⁰ The attention to detail demonstrated by the staff at the gallery was extremely impressive; several staff members proofread and double-checked every detail of the artist

the first of the ten actions would be to 'update' the catalogue. The action of updating the catalogue embodied a futile attempt to reflect how the project had evolved and the impossibility of attempting to definitively describe something that is essentially in flux.

The following is a brief description of each of the ten actions associated with *never-ending sculpture project* based on the didactic information provided to viewers (the original text appears in italics):

action 0: prelude to action one {00:04:04} Prior to the opening of this exhibition (on the 14th of March 2013) ten exhibition catalogues were available, action 0 involves inserting a printed copy of an amended artist's statement (draft 5) into each catalogue and waiting for the remaining 910.

action 1: update the catalogue {01:50:35} For this action the artist's statement was redrafted several times. The action involves inserting a printed copy of the latest version (draft 6) into each catalogue. Since the opening of the exhibition and this action 80 catalogues had been sold, gifted or stolen, they exist without an updated statement

action 2: re-enactment (blind date) {00:00:00} \ CANCELLED

This action was intended to be a re-enactment of a participatory performance that was staged in 2010 in collaboration with artist Anna Cocks. The action was cancelled for several reasons, most notably was my decision to not include other people in the actions.

statements. In a strange way I felt proud of the work that it had already refused to be pinned down

action 3: mimicry (horse) {00:24:29} Horses apply their 'stay apparatus' to sleep while standing. Like the horse, the artist must always be vigilant (During the documentation of this one-hour action the battery in the camera expired after 24 minutes)

This action relates to the idea that artists are always at work even while sleeping. In this context it also asks what is the minimum required to constitute an artistic action? While living in the country surrounded by horses, I noticed that the most common activities for horses during the day was eating and sleeping. This prompted the question what is the value of a horse? Historically they would be put to work, however left to their own devices they spend a great deal of time standing perfectly still. The incongruous image of a motionless animal that is culturally associated with physical activity, with speed and power, was for me, mesmerising.

action 4: observation (sit with work) the artist sat with each of the other works in this exhibition for ten minutes

This action places the artist in the position of the viewer, however it obscures the distinction in several ways. The methodology of sitting with each work for ten minutes is an artistic strategy that few viewers would engage as a viewing practice. The action of viewing is subsequently incorporated into the artist's work thereby magnifying the transformation from a viewer's action to an artist's action.

action 5: mind as material (text){01:32:34} the artist was assured by an associate that the play The Sunset Limited by Cormac McCarthy would be 'life changing'. The artist read the play.

Within this research this one of the extreme examples of an action that treats the artist as material. Here the breach between the monotonous image of an artist reading a book, and the profound effect the action of reading the text (within this work) has on the mind of the artist, is immense. For me personally this action had a powerful and lasting effect.

The above description directs viewers to 'life changing' experiences, and the notion that through our actions we can change our own lives. However the 'life changing' experience viewers are made to witness, is a man sitting calmly reading a book. This action raises the thought that by affecting the mind you affect your world; this notion is significant to several of the actions performed within this work and by strange coincidence it is also the subject of the book.

action 6: mind as material (memory : i had a bad time) {00:36:40} the artist recalled, verbalised, and recorded their unhappiest memory

action 7: gesture (erase) {00:36:40} while listening to the recording of action 6 the artist erased the tape

action 8: mind as material (memory : i had a good time) {00:02:30} the artist recalled, verbalised, and recorded their happiest memory

action 9: gesture (duplicate) {00:05:54} while listening to the recording of action 8 the artist duplicated the tape

action 10: re-enactment (action 9) {00:07:55} the artist re-enacted action 9: gesture (duplicate)

actions 6, 7, 8, and 10 comprise the discrete work *good time - bad time* and are discussed in the following section. It is important to note that action 10 is the only instance of the re-enactment or re-shooting an action within this project. It was conducted in part to compensate for the cancelled re-enactment of action 2 however it was primarily undertaken to replicate the camera angle of action 7. Considering the four actions as a single work that would surface from the context of *never-ending sculpture* influenced my approach. action 10 was performed and documented to resemble action 7 indicating the similarity in appearance, despite their opposing function, of the processes of duplication and erasure.



Fig. 9
Darren Cook, *good time – bad time* 2013 (composite video still)
2-channel video, 36mins: 40secs (loop)
Dimensions variable

***good time - bad time* (2013)**

The original structure of *never-ending sculpture* was intended as an experimental site that could potentially result in the emergence of autonomous works. *good time - bad time* is a component of the *never-ending sculpture* that appeared to be a distinct series of actions that could be presented as a discrete work.

good time - bad time demonstrates a progression from investigating temporal mechanisms to implementing them as a strategy for re-interpreting personal narrative. This was the first occasion in the research that the content of the actions involved deeply personal subject matter. The personal content of the work is however entirely obscured, the audio is absent from the documentation and the actions have been filmed in ways that obstruct the viewer's ability to view and or engage the scene. This is most noticeable in *action 8 (i had a good time)* where the microphone has been positioned between the artist's face and the camera. This method has been employed to extend the exploration of the contradictory revealing and concealing nature of documentation as it is applied within this project.

The chiaroscuro effect of the lighting of these actions (as for *action 3 mimicry*) is essentially how the work is lit during exhibition hours with all other lighting switched off. This was a fortunate coincidence that enhanced the notion of the action occurring in isolation and reinforced the distancing of the viewer.

The obvious contradiction in this work is the artist's desire to share their experience while simultaneously keeping it hidden; a strategy designed to direct the viewer's attention to the structural mechanisms of the work and to elicit the question who is the performance for?

The first action³¹ involved recalling my saddest memory, which was then verbalised and recorded onto reel-to-reel audiotape. In preparation for this action I meditated for one hour, in order to generate a clear and focused cognitive state, so while recalling the memory no ‘other’ thoughts entered my mind. This was significant in order to clearly synthesise the recalled memory with the observed present, enabling me to observe the effect this memory had and continues to have on my present condition. As much as I tried to remain objective the powerful effect of the memory became overwhelming, inducing the realisation that perhaps this event from my past has a more profound influence on my present condition (as I move through time) than I had previously comprehended.

The second action³² incorporated two principle aims; the first was to compare the experience of observing the recall of the memory (from the previous action) with the process of listening to the recorded (recalled) memory via playback of the audiotape. The second was to perform the symbolic act of erasing the tape (recorded in the first action) while listening to the playback. This was performed by observing the tape as it slowly ‘fell’ out of the reel-to-reel player and onto the exposed magnet of an upturned speaker³³.

This second action was far more complex than the first as it involved the layered conflation of the memory of the original event recalled in the first action in addition to the memory of how I was affected by the action of recalling. This generated feedback between the thought of whether the

³¹ *action 6: mind as material (memory : i had a bad time) {00:36:40} the artist recalled, verbalised, and recorded their unhappiest memory*

³² *action 7: gesture (erase) {00:36:40} while listening to the recording of action 6 the artist erased the tape*

³³ The symbolic nature of this act is extended, as the process is not likely to have been very effective in erasing the tape, as the magnet was not particularly powerful.

magnet was (symbolically) erasing the original memory or merely the recording from the previous action, or both. An unexpected consequence of this action was that I noticed myself becoming agitated and slightly annoyed with myself for the way I was describing the memory of the event. Not only was the recording quite protracted (36mins) I also felt I was exaggerating and overestimating the importance of certain details. This was a valuable opportunity to observe the comparison between the experience of being in the time of the original event and the experience of observing the documentation. While recalling the memory in the first action I had no objective perception of the passing of time, this however became painfully apparent while listening to the recording during the second action. Another realisation that arose in reflecting on each of these actions was how my attitude to the events associated with my 'saddest memory' was transformed between telling the story and listening to the playback.

The third and fourth actions³⁴ performed in this work followed the same process as the first two with the exception that the recording was symbolically duplicated rather than erased. This approach was framed by the premise that happiness is achieved by pursuing 'pleasant' experiences and avoiding the unpleasant. Buddhist philosophy posits that this craving and aversion are in fact the source of suffering and that happiness is achieved through training the mind not to develop attachment to impermanent phenomena.

³⁴ *action 8: mind as material (memory : i had a good time) {00:02:30}the artist recalled, verbalised, and recorded their happiest memory and action 10: re-enactment (action 9) {00:07:55} the artist re-enacted action 9: gesture (duplicate)*

sitting with folding time (2013)

The methodology for this work is an extension of the experiment *action 4: observation (sit with work)* conducted within *never-ending sculpture*. This work is also a performance that places the artist in the position of the viewer; the distinction in this case is that the artist is viewing their own work. For this action I sat and listened to each increment of the work *folding time* for 30 minutes and 47 seconds (the length of the original track). In terms of the

distinct elements of the methodology outlined at the beginning of this chapter this work synthesises the idea, action and reflection stages.

The methodology for this work directly reflects the Zen aphorism that John Cage mentions in reference to developing an appreciation of any sonic phenomena, that if something is boring after 2 minutes then try it for 4, if it's still boring try it for 8... eventually you realise that it is not boring at all but is very interesting. (Cage 1961) While developing the work *folding time* listening to the short repetitious increments was highly addictive the repetition is effective in rapidly concentrating the mind in the mode of a mantra. The approach for this work was partly inspired by an incident that occurred in relation to a viewer's encounter with the work *born again* (2010)³⁵ that I produced during my honours research³⁶.

sitting with folding time presents the act of viewing as a performative action and aims to bring the viewer's attention to the self-reflexive aspect of the viewing experience; the observation of the self while viewing a work. This work also examines the research theme of the live encounter with documentation and presents the viewer with the opportunity to repeat the action of the artist. In the context of the research project this work provides perhaps the greatest opportunity for the viewer to empathise with, and simulate the artists' experience³⁷.

³⁵ The work *born again* involved the reconfiguration of a recording of myself singing 'Happy Birthday', so that the entire song is replayed in roughly 0.42 seconds, the approximate statistical global birth rate. The song, which is repeatedly broadcast for each new person born into the world, has been transformed into an unintelligible, monotonous pulsation.

³⁶ The 'viewer' was standing below the work waiting for her daughter (a friend of mine) on the arrival of her daughter she enquired; what is that horrible noise?! When her daughter explained the nature of the work, the 'viewer' completely changed their perception of the noise and stood listening to, what had now become a work of art, with great appreciation.

³⁷ As this work has yet to be exhibited I am unsure as to how audiences will respond, I doubt that any viewer will completely repeat the action. I feel the main response will be to question *why would someone do that?* ironically re-establishing the gulf between artist and viewer

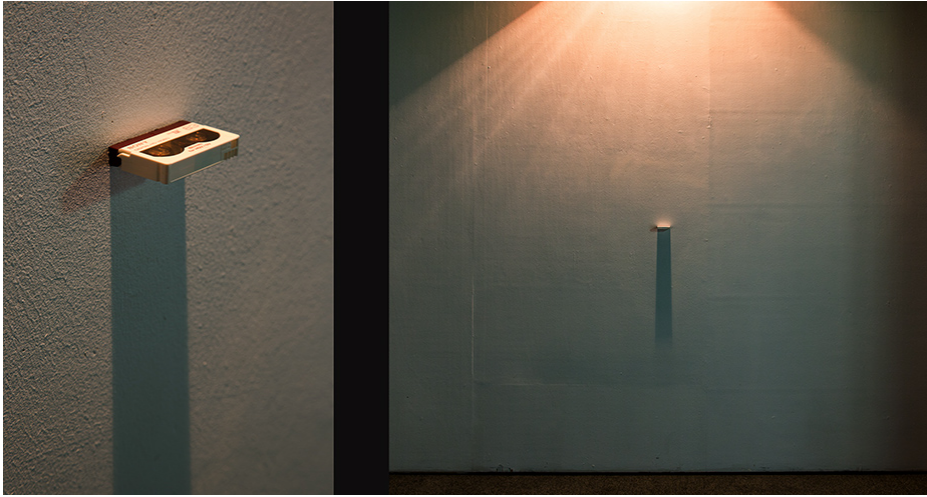


Fig. 10
 Darren Cook
contingent requiem (2013-)
 Sony (63) mini DV Digital HD videotape
 containing a 32min: 12 sec recording

***contingent requiem* (2013 -)**

contingent requiem is a recording of a performance that remains in stasis to be played (if required) once as a live event at an indeterminate point in the future. It is equally possible that the recording will never be played and thus never seen by anyone (including the artist as the event was recorded in a single take and remains unedited). The premise for this work, based on my desire to play *Metamorphosis* by Philip Glass at my Mother's funeral, emerged at the initial stage of the research and was conceived as a method for exploring the potential for recorded events to transcend time. The methodology also considers the artist's experience in terms of performing an action in the present, designed to be viewed in the future.

contingent requiem consists of a video recording of myself playing the solo piano piece *Metamorphosis*. Initially the aim of recording the performance was determined as a strategy to ensure that I learnt the piece, providing the additional motivational constraint of a deadline. This process explored the notion of employing artistic methodology, through the production of a video

performance, to affect the personal life of the artist. Producing this work establishes my ability to perform the piece when required, as it would be most regrettable to have the desire to perform such an action and not have the aptitude. While developing the work the thought occurred to me that it is possible that I could die before my Mother, this idea dramatically altered the nature of the work and the recording itself. In the event that I should die before my Mother the recorded performance serves as a substitute to be played in my absence.

This is the most personal work developed through this research project and is perhaps the most extreme example of exploring the relationship between the artist's experience and the viewer's ability to access the work. As in *good time bad time* the personal content of the work remains with the artist, what the viewer is presented with are the mechanisms related to the artist's engagement with recorded material and recording technologies. In the case of *contingent requiem* the artist has employed the audio-video recording technology to store and thus postpone a live event.

This work demonstrates a dramatic shift from the mundane repetitive actions of earlier works to a highly emotionally charged performance; an action to be performed (live or via live replay) once to a specific audience who will have the privileged position of witnessing the live event. The exhibited work comprises the DV videotape and a written description of the action and the intended purpose of the recording. In this way the work exists in a number of states, as:

The rehearsal process through which the artist developed the proficiency required to perform the piece. A document held in abeyance; a recording with an uncertain future that may or not be presented to an audience. A

gesture reflecting the underlying motivation for rehearsing and performing the work



Fig. 11
Darren Cook, *stornello* (2013-) (detail)

***stornello* (2013)**

As the final work realised through this research project, *stornello* extends the exploration of rehearsal and the establishment of latent performance that exists entirely within the artist(s). *stornello* is a cover version or re-enactment of the song *Stornelli Romani* by Claudio Villa and Renato Rascel, developed in collaboration with another artist (who will remain nameless³⁸) the aim is to perform the piece as similar to the original as possible. The 'original' is a recording of the performance discovered on *Youtube* that my colleague and I compulsively viewed and re-viewed. Over the subsequent days and weeks neither of us could get the song out of our heads as though the performance existed in our minds on continuous loop. The methodology of rehearsing the song was in part a strategy for reclaiming control over the recall of the song and performance.

³⁸ The collaborator in this work has requested that their name be withheld.

Stornelli are traditionally improvised, and *Stornelli Romani* is no exception, this is clearly evident in the reactions of the two performers as they respond to each other's verses. The idea of repeatedly viewing the video is therefore antithetical to the nature of the performance, this was compounded by the process of repeated rehearsals and the intention of a cover version in the first instance.

The installed work comprises an endless loop of the original performance by Villa and Rascel presented on a tablet computer, accompanied by a text describing that the artists have rehearsed a performance of the song with the potential of being spontaneously performed at any moment. Viewers are left with their imagination and an uncertain anticipation to 'complete' the work, there is no indication as to where or when the performance may take place.

Chapter 3. Conclusion

In undertaking this research project my aim has been to develop a range of time-based installations and performance that explore the manipulation and distortion of temporal phenomena. The notion of temporal plasticity has been pursued from two key perspectives:

1. The artist's 'live' temporal experiences while performing actions.
2. The experience of encountering re-presented documentation of the actions (from both the viewer and artist's point of view).

This strategy has been employed to examine, challenge and potentially synthesise the relationship between live and recorded phenomena and the relationship between the artist and viewer.

Several works developed within this project present viewers with documentation that exists simultaneously as an indexical record of an originary event and as a live phenomenon. The work *live recording* (2011) is an explicit example of documentation operating as a live entity. Demonstrating a present physical effect resulting from a re-presented recording of a past event, the work examines the transcendent notion of the synthesis of past and present towards a future expectancy.

The work *where is history?* (202) integrates an artefact (the photocopied book) with the documentation of its own production, resulting in a paradoxical interaction of past and present. The static artefact and the durational documentation vie for indexical authority over the originary event. Both are historical traces, intrinsically linked to the identical past moment, however there is a divergent epistemological relationship. The artefact, particularly through the mode of its installation within the gallery context, is inextricably linked to the historical moment of its production; it is the trace of a past event that has ended. The video documentation is likewise the trace of a past event (the identical event) however via the durational quality of the video it is reactivated with each repeated screening.

The relationship between the artist and viewer has been explored via experiments that challenge epistemological notions of how the content of the works and the experiences of the artist are communicated. These range from generating a coalescence of the artist's experience with the viewer's, evident in the work *siting with folded time* (2013); whereby the viewer is provided the opportunity to replicate the performed action of the artist, in works such as *stornello* (2012 -) and *contingent requiem* (2012 -) that provide little documentation other than succinct written descriptions, leaving the viewer to imagine the nature of the performed actions.

The breadth of the experimentation within the project highlights the subjective position of the viewer, and aims to elicit a self-reflexive awareness within the viewer of their role in the encounter with the work (and the work's realisation). Conversely artistic strategies employed to influence the viewer's temporal experience of the work is demonstrated in the manipulation of recorded time of *folding time* (2012) and in the methods of re-presentation of documentation within an installation context.

The piece *never ending sculpture* (2013) overtly interferes with the viewer's ability to access the documentation component of the installation. This has been realised via the restrained framing of the documentation, including the absence of audio, and occurs as a result of the inherently accumulative quality of the work. The duration of the work will extend interminably as the documentation of additional actions are compiled into the single channel video. Viewing the work, which is currently over five hours in length, will incrementally become more un-viewable in one continuous sitting.

The development of the work *never ending sculpture* (2013) presented a significant opportunity within the research in terms of providing a site and framework for experimentation. The continuous structure and methodological approach provided a platform to explore ideas as they arose without the pressure of producing a resolved outcome. This allowed me to maintain clear and uninterrupted focus while performing the actions within the work, facilitating the realisation of an immanent state of being in time.

The *never ending sculpture* is designed, as the title suggests, to never end and will endure beyond the research project. The most compelling constituent of this work is its propensity to adopt the attributes of natural growth and indeterminacy. The on going pursuit of this work has the potential to exceed the concept of the 'liveness' of documentation to create a work that metaphorically has a life of its own.

Exploring the relationship between live (present) events and recorded (past) events within this research, two key temporal insights emerged:

The notion of immanence:

That is the observation and awareness of 'being in time', the paradoxical experience of an infinite present.

The notion of transcendence:

Which includes the process of memory recollection and future imagining, the idea of experiencing non-existent events from the past or future.

Through the meditative process of performing actions within this project, I have encountered and explored temporal phenomena in a variety of ways. At times significantly experiencing a coalescence of immanent and transcendent awareness; the sense of being in two places or times at once. This was most saliently observed while performing the actions that comprise the work *good time – bad time* (2013)³⁹.

Elements of the methodological approach within this project endeavour to evoke a phenomenal awareness within the viewer of what Deleuze describes as the synthesis of time; the conflation of the past, present, and or future. One strategy for this pursuit involved the use of repetition, both within the actions performed and the modes of presenting documentation.

Deleuze (2004) hypothesises that repetition is not an ‘objective property’ that it exists via memory within the experiencer and that each time an element is repeated it is altered by the changing manner in which we contemplate it. The concept that the perception of repetition is inconsistent and subject to the idiosyncrasies of the perceiver informed a number of works developed in this project.

The work *siting with folded time* (2013) provided the most remarkable experience of the subjectivity of repetition. The repetitions of the tracks are artificial and are perfectly replicated, however in taking the time and effort

³⁹ The methodology of this work was specifically designed to contrast the immanent observation of the effect of recalled memory against the observation of the effect of re-experiencing the memory via documentation.

to actively listen, an improbable modulation of the rhythms occurs. This project endeavours, via encounters with the exhibited outcomes, such as *folded time* (2012), to instigate a self-reflexive awareness in the viewer of their role in the manipulation of temporal plasticity.

The works developed through this project have been created as discrete outcomes that align with the common trajectory of the research enquiry. Several of the works have been presented in exhibitions during the candidature, however the final submission of the complete thesis provides a unique opportunity to observe the interaction and prospective consolidation of the works.

This research project has been highly self-reflexive in nature both in terms of the analysis of my experience and role in producing the work and within the work itself where the methodology forms a significant component of the content. In terms of how the outcomes of this research may be extended in my future practice I believe that there is significant scope for further enquiry into temporal and cognitive plasticity however I intend to pursue this investigation behind the camera rather than in front.

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List of Images

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Fig. 2

Darren Cook

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8 channel video installation, dimensions variable

* All images originally included in the context chapter have been removed to comply with Copyright Legislation.

OTHER WORKS

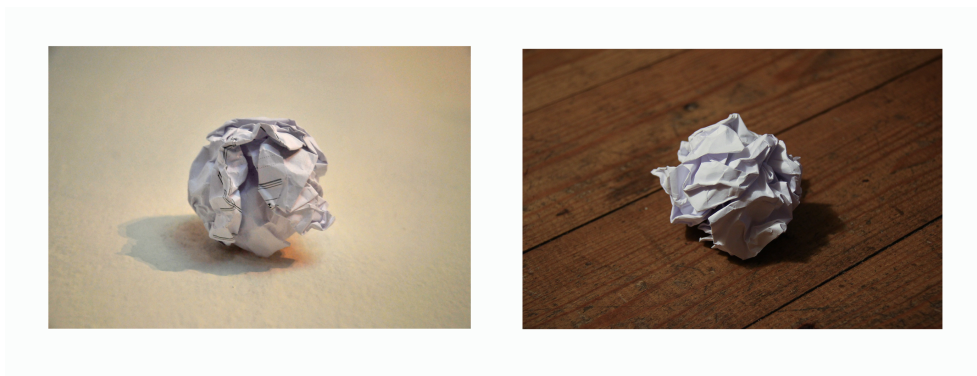


Fig. 12
 Darren Cook, *greatest sculpture*, 2011
 Paper, photographs, dimensions variable.

greatest sculpture (2011)

This work was developed for an exhibition entitled *Best Show*, a group exhibition that explored the notion of artistic ambition through plans and models for over -zealous or unrealisable works. The idea for the work was to create the biggest sculpture in the world. This sculpture was to be made up of three screwed up balls of A4 paper located at three positions on the planet:

- 1 in Port au Prince, Haïti
- 1 in Barcelona, Spain
- 1 in Adelaide, Australia

I invited two close friends, an engineer in Haïti and a performance artist in Spain to produce two of the three balls. Of my friends and family living overseas these locations provided the greatest distances between each ball of paper, resulting in a triangular area just under one million square kilometres.

- 16477 km Adelaide - Haiti
- 16179 km Adelaide - Barcelona
- 28000 km Haiti - Barcelona

The installation comprised of one ball of paper on a plinth in the gallery in Adelaide, and two photos, one of each of the other balls pictured in close up

with no identifiable evidence of their location. On the wall was a world map with the imagined triangle demarcating the area of the sculpture.

Whether or not this work constitutes the largest sculpture in the world rests with the viewer, reliant on such questions as whether or not they accept that three balls of paper constitute a sculpture, and most importantly within the context of this project, whether the viewer believes that the balls of paper are where I claim them to be.

In the context of this project the work is significant in that it explores the relationship between an object and its representation, the veracity of the work is contingent on the perceived authenticity of documentation. Even then the viewer can easily dismiss the work, there is a very fragile relationship between the objects, the artistic intention and the viewer.

Viewers found the work difficult to understand, the conceptual intention of the work was unclear as the installation was not well resolved. Interestingly prior to the exhibition there was much enthusiasm about the work when I discussed it with colleagues. The work existed more successfully as an idea conveyed through a verbal description. This work is an example of an idea that was not fully resolved before moving into the phase of developing an exhibited installation. This work was a valuable learning experience that influenced the development of this project, particularly in regards to resolving work for presentation within gallery contexts and extending the research investigation via the strategy of presenting work to viewers as a verbal or written report. This is most evident in the final three works generated through this project⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ *sitting with folding time* (2013), *contingent requiem* (2013), and *stornello* (2013)



Fig. 32
Darren Cook, *bubble & squeak* (2012)
Mixed media installation, dimensions variable

bubble and squeak

This work was presented as part of the curated group exhibition *Appearing as Process* at Sawtooth ARI. The initial concept for this work was to create a linear audio recording of the entire exhibition duration, by a combination of a large reel of tape (>30cm in diameter) and very slow rotation/movement of the tape. The size of the reel and the speed of rotation are relative to one another i.e. the faster the speed the longer the tape would need to be in order to last the duration of the exhibition and vice versa. A few designs involving slow moving motors were explored to achieve this however none of these prototypes functioned successfully.

This work was in a way a compromise and was presented as a speculative experiment that more or less failed, as it was confusing for viewers. The context of the exhibition largely influenced the outcome of this work. The curatorial premise was focused on work that investigates a state of becoming or that requires the inclusion or intervention of the viewer to be activated and or completed. The solution for how to move the tape was resolved via viewer participation, that is the viewer was required to wind a pasta maker to pull the tape through the players/recorders. Reflecting on this work the viewer participation element defeated the original drive of the work, becoming more concerned with the viewer-artwork relationship, rather than an autonomous work concerned with its own content.

The work included a type of audio letter, a recording of a man (the former owner of the reel-to-reel) describing his travel experiences for someone back home. When the viewer activates the work, the tape is pulled past the play head of the first reel-to-reel and amplified it then passes through the second reel-to-reel which is recording via a microphone. The second reel-to-reel records the amplification of the tape back onto itself along with the ambient sound of the exhibition space including any noise made by the viewer. This process generates a temporal displacement synthesising the past with the present and produces a new dormant recording of the viewer's encounter.

This complex system was not well communicated leaving the majority of viewers confused. One reviewer wrote that the work seemed under resolved yet the fey quality of the installation made it hard not to like. (Harper 2012) This reflects the formal success of the work; the arrangement of objects and lighting of the work generated a compelling mood. One of the most notable elements that perplexed viewers was the inclusion in the installation of a taxidermic duck. The duck was a last minute inclusion and was intended as a reference to human attempts to indefinitely preserve something that is inherently impermanent. The process of taxidermy is comparable to the

process of recording experiences onto tape. In terms of the temporal mechanism this work was significant and influenced the methodology that was investigated further in the late work *good time – bad time* (2013).



Fig. 33
Darren Cook & Laura Hindmarsh, *closure loops* (2012)
8 channel video installation, dimensions variable.

***closure loops* (2012)**

I will not discuss this work in great detail, as it is not particularly significant in terms of the submitted thesis however it did play an important role in the development of the research methodology. The work developed in collaboration with Laura Hindmarsh comprised an eight-channel video installation that aimed to investigate and reveal to viewers correlating aspects of our respective creative processes through documented dialogues and interviews. In one case we had the cameras rolling while we discussed how to set up the two cameras to record a dialogue. Once we had worked out how to shoot the scene we stopped filming. The majority of the dialogues refer obliquely to a common methodology based on developing self-reflexive works. The seeming paradox of this work is that the content of the videos became inaccessible, the monitors were on the floor and the audio was difficult to discern.

This is an example of a work that seemed to fail due to excessive concern for the viewer's experience.

Curriculum Vitae

Selected Education

2010

Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours), UTAS, Hobart

2004

Bachelor of Visual Arts and Applied Design, ACArts, Adelaide

Selected Exhibitions

2013

Testing Ground, Ten Days on the Island Festival, Salamanca Arts Centre.

2012

Still, (collaboration with Matt Warren) Queenstown Heritage and Arts Festival, Queenstown

Appearing as Process, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston

In a Silent Way, CAST, Hobart

North by North, Moonah Arts Centre, Hobart

closure loops, (collaboration with Laura Hindmarsh) Long Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart

2011

Best Show, FELTspace, Adelaide

live recording, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston

Hatched National Graduate Show, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art

Preview & Honours Award Exhibition, Bett Gallery, Hobart

2010

Mix Tape, Long Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart

Rendez-vous, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart

2009

Outpour, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart

2008

Swills Remains, SALA Moving Image Project, Queen's Theatre, Adelaide

2005

transform and roll out, Delacatessen Gallery, Adelaide

Works on Paper Exhibition, Dalian Art College, China

2004

Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition, Torrens Pd. Ground, Adelaide

Exhibitions Curated

2012

Corpse Club, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston

Establishment: Project 1, CAST, Hobart (Co-Curator)

Awards

2010

Bett Gallery Honours Award

Bibliography

2012

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