Abstract

The research considers the role of dissociation in manipulating subjectivity by examining its influence upon dissociative play – a generative method where thought, feeling, action and production are undertaken within multiple dissociated fictional subjectivities. Central to the thesis is a question surrounding the workability of this practice in a contemporary visual arts setting dominated by static unitary self-representational modes.

The paper distinguishes dissociative play from existing fictive and deceptive self-representational strategies in the visual arts that share surface similarity, and asserts that dissociative play differs by its reliance on self-deception, a key feature of dissociation that allows for multiple, often contrapuntal positions to be held by the mind. The research finds that the creative manoeuvrability of this state of mind allows it to freely function with limited conscious awareness, separating it by definition and depth of experience from common fictive and imaginative processes.

The expediency of a wilfully self-deceptive, dissociative approach in shifting perception, memory, subjectivity and agency pushes hard against dissociation’s negative legacy in pathology. Addressing this issue requires both a reassessment of individual agency in pathological instances and an account of the benefits of dissociation in practice.

In bridging pathology and practice, the research argues against the idea that dissociative states are entirely compartmentalised from non-dissociated subjective experience, instead positing that each bleed into the other for the primary benefit of the host. The enquiry reaches into disparate areas to provide evidence of that bleed, drawing from dissociative practices and phenomena in behavioural psychology, acting methodology, auto-fictive literature, heavy metal music and cultural possession - alongside the development of the author’s work creative work Kraken, exhibited at VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery in February 2018 - to demonstrate that not only is it possible to create within a dissociated mind, but particularly advantageous.

It finds that dissociative practices assist in the avoidance of expectation, predilection and self-limitation, and allow artists to work outside their imagined capacity, steered largely by self-initiated hypnotic suggestion and self-deception, and that the generation of novel thoughts, feelings and actions from within a dissociated consciousness have the capacity to translate into seemingly autonomous and unlikely outcomes, affecting practitioners, audiences, and generated material.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
(iii) the thesis is 38,418 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Christopher Patrick Bond
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Preface

At the conclusion of an artist talk I gave in early 2015, an audience member asked, somewhat exasperatedly, ‘So... who are you, exactly?’

While ‘The Kraken’s Reach: Manipulating subjectivity through dissociative play’ denies her any outright answer, I hope that it makes clear the many benefits of working in the minds and bodies of imagined others.
Introduction

The research considers the capacity of dissociative play - an invented term that describes the process of thinking, feeling and working within a fictionalised dissociated subjectivity - to impact conventional modes of expression within a visual arts practice and enable unlikely, uncanny or novel material outcomes. The research questions whether such a methodology can assist visual artists in side-stepping self-conditioned responses to ideas, materials and forms.

I hypothesise that the ability of an artist to fabricate and embody multiple subjectivities through fictional self-representation is useful in the avoidance of expectation, predilection and self-limitation, and enables a degree of autonomy in forms generated through the process. The potential of the methodology to reach these aims is discussed here through the writing, and materialises through the creation of the fictional self-representation Kraken.

The nature of the research demands that the approach taken matches the required psychology for dissociative play– one that is fragmented, far-reaching and flexible. The tentacles of enquiry reach into disparate fields, drawing from dissociative practices and phenomena in behavioural psychology, acting methodology, literary fiction, heavy metal music and cultural possession to demonstrate that it is possible to work within the mind of an imagined other, and particularly advantageous.

In locating the dissociative play psychology in the visual arts, an acknowledgement of existing conceptual and thematic constructs within the arena is necessary to distinguish it from parallel approaches. Within the visual arts, fictive strategies in which characterisation or fictional self-representation is used for the primary purpose of deception share some commonality in appearance with the dissociative practices advocated here, but differ significantly in motivation and construction. The research aims to make these differences clear, and posit dissociative play as an entirely new approach.

Artists who adopt dissociative play, much like those who use fiction and pseudonym, have the potential to make use of an audience’s assumption of an artist’s authentic self-representation to play with genuine intent, creating objects that shift between deception and revelation, coercing
audiences into states of transient belief. But they have something else in addition to this ability—the chance to manipulate their own subjectivity.

The research contends that this self-manipulative capacity is enabled chiefly by self-deception. Its latency frees the artist from the bond of previously held positions, from the memory of what has been done before, and the expectation of what should be done in the future, to hold a subjectivity that exists in the here-and-now through felt experience. This exists separate to the notion of deceiving others, a mainstay of art fiction, and dominates much of the discussion here. As the dissertation unfolds, I argue that the validity of an artist operating inside this kind of self-deceptive framework allows them freedom to move within an autonomously productive domain that sits outside of prevailing genuine self-representational models, typically constricted by identity politics, while avoiding the closed circuit of deception and revelation that currently defines fictional self-representational models within the visual arts.

Instances of fictionalised self-representation in the visual arts are hardly in short supply, and are typically motivated by a desire to deceive. The performances of these deceptive representations within the contemporary visual arts, under the umbrella of art fiction, are already the subject of substantial existing research, notably by Museum of Contemporary Ideas founder Dr Peter Hill, but offer a limited generative potential beyond the presentation of the fiction, and will be addressed throughout the dissertation largely in counterpoint.¹

Fictional self-representations, if they are to offer liberty from the stricture of the genuine, need to impact authorship at the level of creation, not presentation. It is this critical distinction that the writing seeks to clarify and expand.

The motivations and actions of an artist engaged in dissociative play are different to those engaged in the pursuit of fiction or deception, which is designed to hide the real creator of the work and substitute a convincing reality in its place. In dissociative play, the burying of the author and substitution of an alternate reality is a natural outcome of the lived experience of working within the mind of a conjured other, without any need for simulation.

Throughout the writing the terms *host* and *alter* are used to demarcate the experience of the *dissociative play* artist, who I call the *host*, to the fictionalised self-representation that manipulates the host’s subjectivity, who I term the *alter*. Though this terminology is typically used in pathological settings to describe the identity or identities that operate within the mind of a subject diagnosed with *dissociative identity disorder*, it is equally useful here, where it describes a healthy and solicited variant of the same.

In fact, the practice of *dissociative play* draws much from the understanding of the workings of dissociation in pathology. Dissociations, whether in pathology or practice, are disconnections in mental processes that impact upon an individual’s sense of unitary selfhood - their very subjectivity – and are typified by abnormalities in the processing of perception and memory. In a dissociated mind, the kinds of thoughts and feelings associated with the kind of person we think we are can often be absent, or replaced by other feelings, thoughts, memories and even actions that are perceived to be generated from an area outside the *host* or subject’s domain. In the case of a subject with *dissociative identity disorder*, this experience often develops as a coping mechanism to shield the subject from psychological damage, usually as the result of an overwhelming traumatic experience or perceived threat, but in *dissociative play*, its practice instead represents a means to extend an existing yet dormant capacity.

Stepping from pathology into practice is not as treacherous as it may at first appear, as each demand an identical psychology, the former unsolicited, the latter voluntarily offered. As the writing moves forward, the articulation of dissociation in contemporary psychological research is partnered to parallel developments in dissociative cultural practices, to clarify which components of each are most beneficial to the development of a dissociative approach in a visual arts context.

One of the difficulties encountered when working with dissociative research in pathology and practice surrounds the relative experience of agency in each. The subjective experience of one’s sense of control in the world being negatively impacted by dissociation in pathological expressions is often broadcast by clinical psychologists as an unarguable truth. I argue through the writing that the experience of self-rupture that occurs as a result of dissociation is instead an *augmentation* of the subject’s sense of self, regardless of whether it occurs in an unsolicited pathology or willed practice, and offers the potential of an expanded self/world relationship.

In making this positive claim for dissociation I position malleability and subconscious regulation as key factors, and define their operation through what I term *bleed* – breaches in unitary

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subjectivity between host and alter in a dissociated framework that ultimately benefit the host, regardless of the host’s intent.

Hosts, I argue, are always subconsciously in command of their alters, and alters, I contend, exist for the exclusive benefit of the host, and for that relationship to continue the host needs to maintain a psychological condition that is able to avoid the conscious recognition of their circumstantial reality. Within a dissociated mind, the fluidity of influence between host and alter is kept balanced for the benefit of the host, and each must remain flexible and agile in order to provide it.

Maintaining a self-deceptive, dissociated psychology within a visual arts setting comes with some difficulty. How might such a psychology be possible in a realm in which self-conscious awareness – self-deception’s very enemy – is considered a critical requirement? I build an argument throughout the text that it is possible, and even likely, if we bring to the research an understanding of how self-deception is willingly enabled through self-initiated hypnotic suggestion.

Regardless of setting, I argue throughout the research that developing a self-deceptive belief in the possibility of generating thoughts, feelings, actions and memories seemingly outside of the jurisdiction of the self is all that is required for it to effectively operate.

Despite the current conspicuous absence of dissociative practices in the visual arts, the arts as a whole do not deny dissociation’s influence. Acts of dissociation already occur frequently in the arts, more often in narrative orientated disciplines where self-representation is disguised, displaced, disfigured or fragmented.

In the visual arts, its dearth is largely a result of conventions of self-representation that uphold the authenticity of the author/creator as a single vessel of carriage, one that truthfully documents the impact of the world upon its particular subjectivity. The self-portrait is the conventional means of this conveyance, so convincing and reliable a mechanism that even fictional characterisations of identity made within its body tend to be misinterpreted as semi-disguised self-revelation.

I contend throughout the writing that although it may be considered something of a hindrance to the development of the idea of a representation outside of the self, the conventions of authorial display within the visual arts provide just the right place for its introduction, where its presence amongst creators and audiences is unexpected, and where the subjective experience of the
creator as character, creator as fragmented multiple, host as alter is as likely to emerge from its representation through documentation and material production as much as its lived reality.

The focus through the research on the impact to artistic production wrought by dissociative play is a natural consequence of the materiality of the visual arts environment in which the process plays out. But more significantly, the material and documentary outcomes of dissociative play provide a tangible, quality-based measure of the distance an artist can make between what they imagine might be possible in a singular, unified subjectivity and what is possible in a headspace populated by multiple fictional subjectivities.

Before the specificities of production are addressed, however, a far simpler question needs to be asked: why bother embodying multiple fictional self-characterisations when simpler means to generating new ideas and production are already accessible through authentic self-representation?

The research tackles this challenge in part through the lens of evolutionary psychology, looking at the advantages of fictionalised self-representation in the social world, where self-deceptions masked by dissociation offer a distinct evolutionary benefit; in part through the success of dissociated author-as-character strategies in literature in generating novel narrative and disrupting conventions of authorship and control; in part through the influence of double consciousness upon the development of new acting methodologies and dissociation in improvisational mask-play; in part through an analysis of the critical role of fictionalised identity in Black Metal music; in part through the communicative power and alternate reality construction in cultural possession rituals; and in part through its uptake in the phenomena of pervasive play.

Quite separate to advancing an argument for the relevance of fictionalised self-identity and dissociation in enabling novel and unlikely generation, however, is the provision of regulation for its deployment. As the research develops, I question how invasive the self-representation needs to be to remain effective, the role of conscious control mechanisms in maintaining the perception of its reality, and what happens when the subconscious control of the host over the actions of the host’s alters is perceived to be lost.

The objects that artists use to guide their dissociated self-representations are also considered throughout the research. The role of these prop forms within fictive scenarios is scrutinized, with an emphasis on advancing their longevity and autonomy. Objects that visual artists conventionally use to sustain their deceptions in art fictions quickly lose operative power after their deceit is revealed, but within a dissociative play methodology, where the beginnings and ends of fictions
are more fluid, these props have the opportunity for an extended life, and a measure of autonomy. The research looks at how these objects might be refashioned to outgrow the fictions in which they were conceived, beginning with a reinterpretation of Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, before moving to focus on contemporary artists whose performance of fictionalised identity is a transitional mode, designed for object production and regeneration, not strictly performance. The simulation of identity that these artists engage in permits a temporary removal of the self from the process of making, opening a psychological space ripe for invention and autonomous production.

It is within this psychology that *Kraken* roams. In late 2014 an invented Norwegian artist named Tor Rasmussen (also known as Kraken), travelled to Australia to stay with me for a six week domestic residency, as part of an international arts residency program. During this time he caused significant upheaval - threatening, tormenting, disabling and frustrating. I play Kraken, as well as residency program manager Julie Redfern, alongside a version of myself, employing photography, video, and textual correspondence to establish an environment characterised by self-deception, in which I act, create and be.

*Kraken* is in part motivated by a desire to avoid literal, learnt response, training to spread and reform that predisposition across multiple subjective platforms. The use of a textual narrative is the primary source in this endeavour, from which I must act, at the mercy of the characterisation, inviting multiple imaginative responses not always to my liking. The research asserts that as a result of the disruption of authorial control, and denial of habitual response, the distance between maker and made is extended, and the potential for autonomy in generated forms is made more likely.

*Kraken* roams at the centre of *dissociative play*, a grim blank, a corpse-painted mask. But who is he, exactly? Why does he need to be?

‘The *Kraken’s reach: Manipulating subjectivity through dissociative play*’ proposes an answer, through an explanation of the conditions in which such a character is absolutely necessary, before expanding to articulate an ideal methodology for embodiment. Through Kraken’s body, a generative method of spawning form through dissociation is attempted, testing whether the transformative power of a characterisation can wrestle the psyche from limitation and entropy, cause instability, create unlikely scenarios, and enable distance.
1. Movement in the Depths: The Science and Shape of Dissociative Play

Imagine what might happen when what we hold inside – our thoughts, memories and predilections, our habits and regrets – is temporarily and wilfully displaced. In this theatre of the mind, a curtain might open to reveal a stage on which we stand empty and free—thinking, feeling, and inventing from within the personae of imagined others, from outside the confines of a singular subjectivity.

Throughout the writing this way of thinking and acting is termed *dissociative play*. The focus of the discussion throughout the writing is on cementing *dissociative play*’s relationship to the visual arts, in the development of a manipulable theory that seeks to assist artists in side-stepping self-imposed conditioned response and enable unlikely material outcomes. In order to make this possible, a significant amount of contextual support is required to be drawn from disparate and far-flung fields.

While new to the visual arts, *dissociative play* is already well-defined in other disciplines, and within certain pathologies, under different names and guises. In order to build an argument for the potential of *dissociative play* in the visual arts, these existing forms need to be defined in order to provide a logic that can be expanded and shaped, and where necessary, argued against. In this chapter, *dissociative play* is pulled apart in order to study its neurologic foundations, to analyse its appearance in psycho-behavioural pathologies, and to understand its role in acting theory, performance and phenomenology.

Within the visual arts, any attempt at *dissociative play* runs counter to, yet appears to intersect with, the contemporary currency of the deceptive and the fictional. The chapter begins with an argument against the legitimacy of deceptive and fictional art practices, distinguishing *dissociative play* as an entirely separate phenomenon.

Following that discussion, self-deception is evaluated in a consideration of its similarity to *dissociative play*, and its dissimilarity to deception.

Dissociation itself is then re-considered, as a non-unitary state of mind in which free practice rather than static pathology might be conceived.
For those diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, however, dissociation is far from emancipatory: it is a pathology staged inside the mind in the face of trauma, a coping mechanism composed of alters that sometimes assist, but often derail, their host’s waking existence, and is discussed within this chapter in respect to the condition’s similarity to the use of alters in dissociative play.

From here, the dialogue shifts to the relationship of dissociative play to performance methodologies and theories of acting, before a discussion that attempts to bind the appearance and function of dissociation in neuroscience, behavioural psychology and performance into a model that advocates controlled, wilful dissociative play.

The chapter closes with an examination of the immersive and pervasive play formats that appear to fulfil most of the criteria for dissociative play, but are burdened by external regulation and communal interaction, pushing the discussion toward a practice characterised more by autonomous self-suggestion.

1.1 Deception, Art Fiction and Dissociative Play

When considering the possibility of making artworks at a distance from the self, there will inevitably be leaps taken to conflate any material outcome with existing forms of a similar appearance. Here, an argument will be made to separate the practice of dissociative play from deceptive and fictional practices that on the surface may appear to be one and the same.

Deceptive, fictional and dissociative play practices appear to share commonality in the displacement, disfiguring and disguise of authorship. Material outcomes of each of these processes appear not to be made by the actual creator of the work, but by another subject altogether.

So, how do they differ?

Deceptive practices within the visual arts are designed to permanently hide the real creator of the work, and posit an existing, typically respected figure in their place. Historically, deception has made a comfortable seat for itself within the visual arts, as a shadow of genuine representation, mimicking conventions of truth and authority. Its operation in this arena differs little from its function in other socio-cultural domains, as a destabilising force for the primary purpose of self-

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3 Representation itself may also be considered a form of deception- a fiction invented to fill the gap between the truth of the world and our interpretation of it.
enrichment. Manifestations of its appearance within the visual arts have been amply documented in the study of historic forgeries and hoaxes, instances of which frequently disrupt continuums of canonisation and collectability. The visual arts are as rich a field as any other form of human endeavour when looking for signs of deception - of power, greed, revenge and satire, each of which appear as primary motivators when concealing authorship. Here, their success is based on an ability to slip by unrecognised - for as long as the deception needs to last - for the deceiver to gain financial reward, notoriety, or to enable cultural destabilisation.

The practice of dissociative play is not deceptive. It does not disguise authorship, but fragments it. It is not enacted for short-term self-gain, but is instead performed to expand subjective agency. And dissociative play is in no way subversive: instead it represents a way forward for individuals to free themselves from constraint, to operate at a remove from themselves, but not from societal or cultural norms necessarily.

On the surface, dissociative play appears to have more in common with art fiction than outright deception. Art fictions play with invented authors, subjects and institutions that parallel or pervert existing modalities, and share commonality with dissociative play in appearing to temporarily suspend the expression of authorial singularity.

Art fictions are specifically post-modern expressions that have their origins in the authorial inventions of Marcel Duchamp, and thrive in a contemporary context where institutional hierarchies of power allow scope for audiences to be manipulated and authorial play to abound. Where they differ from dissociative play expressions, apart from dissimilarities in method and production is in the treatment of deception and revelation - within art fictions, an audience’s acknowledgement of the fiction inherent in the work is a critical operative feature. In dissociative play, however, neither deception nor revelation is useful in production and exhibition, though an audience looking at the apparently deceptive material form of a dissociative play expression may be forgiven for thinking otherwise.

To clarify, an analysis of the operation of two archetypal art fictions follows.

Canadian installation artist Iris Häusssler’s art fictions employ deception as a means to test the potential for coherence and plausibility within seemingly illogical scenarios, and as a pathway to play. Only deception provides the space she needs to work in this manner, and her invented characters supply the creative means to fill it. Speaking of her 2008-2010 fictional archaeological
installation *He Named Her Amber* (fig. 1.1), she says, ‘It’s like taking off a corset. These characters give me permission. You allow yourself to play, then things come up.’[^4][^5]

Aspects of the methodology that Häussler engages with appear on the surface at least to share some similarity to the freedoms offered by *dissociative play*, of the ability to temporarily escape the confines of expectation and ego-observance to create in the likeness of an *other*, or in Häussler’s case, multiple others (a butler, a maid, an archaeological survey company). The defining difference, however, lies in intent. Häussler’s characterisations are placed in exhibition scenarios explicitly geared towards deception, and carefully timed to be revealed. The forms that emerge from her processes become empty vessels post-revelation and her characters are too site-specific to be reanimated elsewhere. No such issue exists in *dissociative play*.

*He named Her Amber* rests on top of previous fictional outings, including a 2006 installation in which she created over 100 sculptures, numerous drawings and gathered supporting ephemera under the moniker of fictional hermetic artist Joseph Wagenbach in *The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach*.[^6] Both *Amber* and *Wagenbach* rely on an unwitting audience prepared to accept what they see in front of them as incontestable fact. Häussler’s efforts to create an environment in which this might be possible are thorough to the point of overcompensation, employing museological and archaeological methodologies to create an atmosphere of discovery, where the viewer’s entrance to the work appears to interrupt an ongoing investigation. This kind of structure is both typical and necessary in an art fiction, where the specificity, detail and museum-like appearance of the exhibition environment induces a feeling that it is indeed an apparent slice of reality, a verisimilitude to which the viewer accedes. *Dissociative play* doesn’t require any such structure – it can happen anywhere, be specific or general, convincing or otherwise.

Häussler’s *He named her Amber* aptly illustrates art fiction’s reliance on a deception/revelation complex. The unveiling of her work as fiction is initiated by her or an associate through a variety of strategies (email correspondence, press conference and letters of disclosure) soon after the visitor has been through the exhibition.[^7] Though considered essential to the life of the work, the self-initiated unveiling is problematic for Häussler, who has encountered strong criticism from audiences who feel cheated of their expectation for genuine representation.[^8] Here, the

[^7]: MacKay, 85.
[^8]: Ibid., 84.
vulnerability of an audience seeking exactly what the artist appears to be offering—authority, definition, causality and revelation (when she is in reality offering the opposite) is exposed. The continued unwavering belief of the audience in the factuality of her somewhat implausible narratives through the duration of her exhibitions is essential in order to satisfactorily fulfil what social psychologists commonly refer to as a ‘needs-based exchange’, a requirement that the act of deception offer as much benefit to the deceiver as to the deceived.  

The relationship between the two is mutually beneficial for as long as the deception runs. The audience get what they need in terms of narrative, and the artist is given a space free from expectation in which to create. What might seem like an ideal circumstance in which to create, however, is anything but, as it limits the range of possible interpretations, denies autonomous motivation-free production and subjugates any wider potential in the artist’s experience of alternate subjectivities, falling well short of what **dissociative play** seeks to offers artists and audiences in processes and outcomes.

As discussed, art fictions have a clear timeframe of efficacy for artists and audiences, beginning at public exhibition, and ending at the public exposure of the work as fiction. What might at first appear to be an exception is when the deception is used by artists for the **purpose** of revelation. In instances of art fictions coloured by hoax, the operative period is strictly post-revelation, where the desired satire or critical commentary comes into play only after the deception has been exposed. Here, again, the timing conditions necessary for the deception to be successful deny its efficacy as an open ended, **dissociative play** strategy. Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera’s Fauna (fig. 1.2) suffers from this limitation.  

Their collaborative installation of writing, photographs, x-rays and specimens of entirely new hybrids of animals discovered in the archives of fictional German zoologist Dr Peter Ameisenhaufen, uses an institutional setting (MOMA, New York) and a willing audience for what is perhaps more scientific hoax than visual art fiction. Here, with deception as the primary motivator, what freedom might be gained from the relative anonymity of the fiction is lost to the allure of satire, of the need for the hoax to be discovered, to be known.

Space and audience awareness are two further limiters in art fictions. Deceptions are most effective in spaces where an audience, desperate for narrative content (as a result of its contemporary absence, clinging to Pre-Modernist presumptions about the illustrative or

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referential role of art), seek against all logic to have that expectation fulfilled. Such spaces are limited to those institutions where a ‘regularity is known or expected’, where the authority of the institution carries with it the presumption of non-deceptive representation. Exhibition outside an institutional setting carries the risk of scuttling the ability of the deception to carry out its primary function— to deceive.

Audience pre-knowledge also decreases the value of an artist’s deception. With each fiction produced, an accumulation of public awareness drains each subsequent effort not just of its ability to fool, but its ability to inspire emotional and critical engagement.

Audience pre-conditioning may also contribute, through repetition, to a gradual degeneration of the artist’s ability to stretch outside their nature, to make works that appear fictional but are in fact simply autobiographic, cramping any room for expressions outside of the self.

So where does this leave deception? Is it entirely unworkable within a dissociative play setting? If we look to other forms within the arts where deception plays a part, like film, performance and literature, deception is part of an open strategy where fictional representations exist as suggestive models awaiting an audience’s imaginative response or interpretation. Here, the audience and artist/writer engage in a shared system of knowing, engagement, and observation, where the deception is a convention, simply ‘fiction,’ and disbelief is voluntarily suspended by audiences seeking to engage with the narrative at play. Genuine deception within fiction is still possible, through ‘factional’ forms such as fictional histories and biographies, but fiction itself is not considered deceptive.

So how might it be possible for visual artists to access the interpretative potential found in expected deceptive forms like film, literature and the performing arts to create ‘open’ forms, leaving behind the need for deliberate subterfuge and timed revelation?

It might surprise that the answer lies in deception, though not in the guise of what has just been discussed, but in a sub-form that links closer to the pathology of dissociation, in a form that can be readily co-opted into a dissociative play practice: self-deception.

12 Stieg Persson, "Supreme Nordic Art-Images of Death Metal " (University of Melbourne, 1998).
13 A regularity is a normative expectation. Further, ‘Any time a regularity is known or expected, the sign of the regularity can be used to deceive.’ in: Mitchell, 826.
14 Ibid., 844.
15 Curiously, Robert Mitchell’s analysis of the psycho-social operation of deception speaks of ‘conventions of insincerity and falseness’ that create ‘shared systems of interpretation and meaning,’ within involuntary, manipulative deceptions ibid., 821-3.
1.2 Self-Deception and Dissociative Play

What happens when we self-deceive, and how might a state of self-deception offer an inroad into the development of a dissociative play methodology? Within this section, self-deception is analysed in terms of its appearance in psychology as a mental state that bears similarity to dissociation, and as an adaptable condition within a dissociative play practice.

What is self-deception and how does it differ from deception?

Deception and self-deception are distinct psycho-behavioural states. Though deceivers and self-deceivers share commonality in some of the manifestations of their condition, such as lying, obfuscation and exaggeration, the conscious, self-aware intent that drives the deceiver to lie is usually missing in the self-deceiver, and as a result of this distinction, self-deceivers are largely unaware of their condition (though not entirely unaware, as will be discussed further), while deceivers are more likely to be willing agents.\(^\text{16}\) What is surprising, and perhaps counter intuitive given the apparent lead in agency that deceivers have over self-deceivers, is that in terms of deceptive acuity the self-deceiving mind is far more effective than the consciously deceptive. Success in deceitful interactions is more likely for a self-deceiver as opposed to a deceiver, as they are less likely to reveal clues that might lead others to be suspicious of their actual intent.\(^\text{17}\)

Self-deception is characterised by the paradoxical condition of the self-deceiver being both deceiver and deceived. In the mind of the self-deceiver, explicit and implicit memories, explicit and implicit attitudes, as well automatic and controlled processes are typically bifurcated in order for the self-deception to be realised.\(^\text{18}\) The self-deceptive mind is not consciously aware of and has limited access to the parts of the brain that govern motivation, leaving the self-deceptive individual in the position of being able to act in a manner contrary to their circumstantial reality.

Self-deceptive pathologies have the capacity to inform dissociative play methodologies when we consider how the brain consciously manages this kind of activity, primarily through its ability to hold truths and falsehoods simultaneously, to dissociate. Self-deception is enabled by the brain’s facility to split and separate mental processes - even when they relate to the same activity - to ensure that cognition of logical oppositions never occurs.\(^\text{19}\) In a self-deceptive, dissociated consciousness, both mind and body have the capacity to function independently of conscious


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
capacity, and by extension, subjective constraint. If this kind of capacity could be willed into action, as a method rather than a pathology, it could open an entirely unexplored terrain of altered subjectivity, where what ordinarily informs our actions – our memories, preferences, anxieties and socio-cultural cognisance, is no longer relevant or restricting.

It is important to stress at this early stage that this kind of conjecture is not idly speculative. In fact, the temporary willed abandonment of fixed, singular subjective response, the core of dissociative play, is already a methodological reality in other disciplines, particularly in acting, where it will be discussed in further detail in following sections. But a sticking point remains: within the contemporary visual arts at least, where self-aware critical observance is the norm, the psychological conditions necessary for self-deception or other dissociated states seem almost absent. How can a consciousness that resides in the absence of personal insight thrive in an environment dominated by mindfulness? The aim of the thesis is to provide evidentiary support from other disciplines and cultural formations – artistic, medical and otherwise – to prove that it is possible.

Self-deception is an apt beginning point in developing a workable model, as a growing body of research supports it as a widespread and advantageous dissociative pathology that may be more manipulable than previously thought. In addressing this research, and determining which aspects are most relevant to dissociative play, we need to momentarily set aside the assumption that all human pathologies, those aberrations around which treatments and speculation circle, are inherently negative.

In new research in the realm of evolutionary and behavioural psychology, the pathological condition of self-deception is now considered to be peculiarly advantageous. Until very recently, research into the operation of self-deception in behavioural psychology evaluated self-deception as an ego-defence strategy enabled by the mind to counter adverse circumstances. Here, it was thought that the self-deceptive mind enabled a false sense of control, or was simply deployed as an oppositional defence mechanism against a negative reality.

Further, within this convention truth and falsehoods were said to be boxed within the self-deceiving brain– with truth lying dormant in the unconscious mind and falsehoods elevated to the conscious, with no bleed between. But this thinking has proven erroneous. The concept of the self-deceiver as an entirely unaware victim of their condition has been scuttled in research that suggests that self-deceivers hold some awareness of their self-deception, and even act in a

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20 Ibid., 12.
21 Ibid., 13.
manner to maintain it. They do this because it is advantageous to do so – not only because the maintenance of self-deception is useful as an aide in maintaining the deception of others (and gaining advantage by it), but also because self-deception is a tool that assists in other areas, like social advancement. The self-inflation and self-enhancement often associated with self-deception, subtler than the excesses found in delusion, help in gaining advantage in a spectrum of social situations, assisting in the development of psychological well-being.\textsuperscript{22}

The key point here, setting aside any wider discussion surrounding psychological advantage, resides in the neurological manipulability of the condition. Self-deceivers use a variety of strategies to maintain their condition. Though they may not choose to become self-deceptive, or be consciously aware of it, the manner in which a self-deceptive individual acts to block the accurate processing of information that may otherwise alert them to their condition, or selectively compartmentalise memories that when recalled allow them to corroborate the validity of their current position, testifies to the extent to which the brain, when it senses advantage, is able to fracture what might be considered a singular sense of self and override typical neurologic activity to establish a positive, offensive, performed dissociated state.\textsuperscript{23}

There is, however, an amount of distance to cover between what has been described here - an essentially unsolicited pathological condition - and what might become a useful willed method, and that is the task of the section that follows.

1.3 Dissociation: Pathology, Norm and Practice

What follows is a bridge between research into dissociative pathologies, normative dissociations and the practice of dissociative play.

Self-deception, examined in the previous section, is one condition amongst many that can be categorised as both dissociative and pathological. Dissociative pathologies are typified by disconnections in mental processes that impact upon an individual’s continuum of selfhood, usually as a result of overwhelming experience (trauma) or threat (incapacity) perception. In dissociative pathologies, particular mental processes act independently at a level below conscious awareness, disconnecting the subject from the reconciliation of feelings, thoughts and memories, which can culminate in the appearance of a fractured identity. The disorders dissociative identity

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 4-6.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 13.
disorder (previously known as multiple personality disorder, characterised by the existence of alter characters within the subject), dissociative amnesia (the inability to recollect important personal memories) and depersonalisation disorder (a disconnection to feelings and sense of selfhood) are three key dissociative pathologies defined by the American Psychiatric Association, each of which share some overlap, and components of which play a role in the development of dissociative play.24

There are few fields in psychiatry that attract as much critical conjecture as the study of dissociation. As we will see in chapter three, Altered States of Consciousness and the Bleeding Self in Dissociative Play, anthropological enquiries into culturally specific dissociated states (for example, spirit possession phenomena) attract an equal measure of criticism and controversy. The reason for this is straightforward: though there is little doubt that these states of fracture exist (irrespective of culture, gender or ethnicity), there is yet to be a definitive consensus on how dissociation actually operates in terms of brain activity, and the amount of control (and by inference culpability) that dissociated subjects have over the direction of their condition.

What is generally accepted and rarely questioned is the assumption that the experience of self-rupture that occurs as a result of dissociation contributes to a drop in agential control, resulting in the feeling of a loss of ownership over thoughts and movements.25 In this condition, an individual may feel that their mind or body is controlled by an external force or entity— that their thoughts and actions are not entirely theirs. I will argue later in this section that this sensation is instead an augmentation of the subject’s selfhood, and offers the potential of an expanded agency.

Unified, singular (non-dissociated) personalities are typified by the self-recognition of static social, psychological and physical components (the parts of us that don’t change, or only seem to change gradually) contributing to what is termed a ‘continuity of identity’.26 The recognition of this continuity is usually the result of automatic, implicit processes, supported by memories that validate the currency of the ‘here and now’ through an accord with previous experience. Any disruption to this process, whether as the result of trauma or otherwise, is externally observable through changes to actions, speech, social role and relationships. These deviations become pathological when they negatively impact the individual or those around them.

But to determine dissociative pathology’s relationship to dissociative play, the focus needs to shift from the conventions of external observation and interpretation to an operative understanding of the internal dynamics of dissociative mental processes. Fortunately much of the current research into dissociative identity disorder has taken the same path, though for different reasons—to develop more effective clinical treatment options and to provide clarity in legal cases where there is confusion surrounding the culpability of individuals committing criminal acts under the guise of alter identities. But speculation surrounding the operation of dissociation for clinicians and psychiatrists still has much to offer the research here, particularly in relation to issues of malleability and regulation—gauging the extent to which the dissociated host subject is in command of the play of their alter/s. It is to the operation of these two factors in dissociative pathology that provides an entry into practice.

It needs to be stressed that alters in a clinically diagnosed dissociative identity disorder are formed for altogether different reasons to the self-engineered alters found in a dissociative play model, as they typically develop as a coping mechanism for childhood trauma, where the alter shields the developing host from psychological damage.

But dissociative identity disorder and dissociative play alters do share commonality in agential capacity. Alters in both cases are self-regulated and exist to bypass the host subject’s agential limitations. Far from being lost or subjugated to the will of the alter, I instead contend that agency is expanded. Here, the splitting of processes and partial handover of control to an invented alter allows the individual to experience new, unlikely subjectivities.

Recent research into the neural networks and behaviour of dissociated individuals supports this theory, suggesting that, far from dissociation being an entirely compartmentalised phenomenon over which the subject has little control, there is within the dissociated state a surprising amount of room for invention, manipulation and, I would argue, play. I contend that if all dissociations were simply unsolicited rigidly compartmentalised ruptures in subjectivity that compromised individual agency, there wouldn’t be any evidence to suggest an alternative interpretation. But there is ample.

The problem in arguing this position is that it comes up against a large body of research specifically designed to cement dissociation’s link to childhood trauma. This wall of literature either neglects to consider or actively argues against the potential for positive control

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27 Merckelbach, Devilly, and Rassin, 485-6.
mechanisms, bleed between alter states, cultural dissociations and non-pathological dissociative fantasia phenomena. But even a cursory look into the kinds of constructive dissociations that we enact every day provides ground for reconsidering the extent and value of dissociative phenomena outside clinical and pathological expressions. In fact, these very ‘normal’ dissociations are far more widespread than defensive or adaptive dissociations linked to trauma.  

Normative dissociations may be intentional (linked to motivation) or spontaneous (involuntary), but either way these experiences begin with a narrowing of perception, involve intense absorption and cognitive involvement, and contribute to an exclusion or dissociation of the content and context of external experience, blocking out ‘perceptual background’ and effectively creating an alternate self-world relationship. They are found in the day-to-day experiences of daydreaming, psychically restorative escapist fantasy and positive reinforcement activities (in events or activities of high personal significance).

Where these normative dissociations differ from pathological expressions is in their adaptive functionality, absence of deficit (negative affect), and presence of post-occurrence recognition. These, perhaps not surprisingly, are also conditions necessary for dissociative play to flourish.

But even within clinically diagnosed dissociative pathologies, there is much that is potentially useful, functional, and perhaps even advantageous, when considering what might be brought into a dissociative play practice. Consider alter states within dissociative identity disorder: here the host-alter relationship draws the host into a wider reaching relationship with the world, where the fluidity of interaction and influence between identity states has the potential to fracture singular, ineffective self-world strategies and promote divergent multi-subjective response.

This latent capacity is enabled by the inherent flexibility of the dissociated alter state. Though alters are born from the singular, fixed imagination of the subject, these unsolicited metaphoric identities are required to continuously and autonomously adapt to escape conscious detection by the host. Both the host and alter work in a mutually beneficial arrangement where conscious

30 Ibid., 241.
32 Ibid.
33 An example is the back and forth inflation and derailing of host or alter, a kind of dialogue of regulation, invention and negotiation, in Öztürk Erdinç, "Formation and Functions of Alter Personalities in Dissociative Identity Disorder: A Theoretical and Clinical Elaboration," Journal of Psychology & Clinical Psychiatry 6, no. 6 (2016).
34 Merckelbach, Devilly, and Rassin.
awareness of the other’s existence is boxed and sealed, but where each state effectively keeps the other regulated.

In building a bridge between dissociative pathologies and practices, while acknowledging commonality in malleability and self-regulation, there also needs to be recognition of the differences of each in terms of formation, motivation and conscious awareness. The practice of dissociative play does not call for a descent into a consciously unaware psychology to shield the mind from trauma, or for any other psychological benefit, but drives the host in a conscious, self-aware and self-regulated manner to a psychology where multiple subjectivities reside, and from which new expressions are encouraged.

In order to provide evidentiary support for such a position, there needs to be a turn to a consideration of consciously motivated, willed dissociations. Although the pathological alter states described throughout this section are devoid of motivation outside of the subconscious desires of the host, it is important to stress that not all dissociated states suffer that limitation. As we will see later in chapter three, culturally-codified dissociated possession states that are consciously controlled thrive outside the reach of psychiatric intervention. Further, in the craft of acting, discussed in sections 1.5 and 3.7, self-directed dissociative play is encouraged often in direct opposition to subliminal aspiration. But if we remove psychological motivation from the picture entirely, we get a clearer view of how dissociation might be enabled, and that is where the discussion heads next, to non-pathological dissociated states induced by hypnosis, where suggestion stimulates semi-autonomous expression.

1.4 Hypnosis and Creative Dissociation

Here I contend that if a semi-autonomous, creatively adaptable non-pathological state of dissociation can be induced in an experimental setting, it can be acted out in a dissociative play framework. Within this section, dissociated states that are temporary and inducible through hypnotic and self-hypnotic suggestion are analysed in terms of creative manoeuvrability and relative autonomy from the conscious mind.

A beginning point in negotiating this area is in the relaying of three curious, but revealing pieces of information: within clinical settings, individuals who report dissociative symptoms score high

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While this may sound somewhat parasitic, it is important to keep in mind that the dissociated alter state is invented to assist the host, not hinder. Even homicidal and suicidal alters could be classed as assistive, as they exist to satisfy a subconscious need not able to be consciously activated by the host.
on tests of fantasy proneness. A link also exists between the hypnotic suggestibility of subjects chosen for experimental research and the ability to fantasise. And in studies of students of fine art institutions, there is evidence of a connection between dissociative experiences and high levels of creative imagination, absorption and fantasy. What this cross-disciplinary correlation shows is a strong association in individuals between dissociative susceptibility and imaginative capacity, which is useful to keep in mind when considering the discussion below.

Dissociative, hypnotic and high-functioning creative states share similarity in the subject’s willingness or capability to maintain absorption. Each of these states involves the committing of all available cognitive resources to block external distraction, enabling a temporary loss of connection to reality and selfhood. Could a state of absorption be another critical condition of dissociative play?

The state of absorption, whether self-initiated or otherwise, is not passive or inert. Instead, it is at some level self-regulated to maintain functionality, and to do so it must remain elastic. Evidence of the amount of elasticity possible within this state has been gauged in studies of highly hypnotically suggestible volunteers, which suggest that in order for the absorbed, dissociated mind to avoid triggering the conscious mind’s cognition of reality, it must manipulate, limit or pervert the brain’s perception of the material world.

Within these studies, the absorbed hypnotised mind hallucinates or dissociates to reconcile conflicts between observed reality and hypnotic suggestion, interpreting instruction in surprisingly imaginative and creative ways. A very early example is the case of Elise, an eighteen year old servant hypnotised by the 19th century neurologist Hippolyte Bernheim, recounted by Steven Braude. In an experiment to test the potential of what is termed ‘negative hallucination’, Bernheim hypnotised Elise, and when she was in trance said to her, “When you wake, you will no longer see me. I shall have gone.” What followed Bernheim’s verbal prompt would definitely not have been approved by any contemporary ethics committee, as it involved Bernheim subjecting

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36 Merckelbach, Devilly, and Rassin, 489.
37 Joseph P. Green and Steven Jay Lynn, "Fantasy Proneness and Hypnotizability: Another Look," Contemporary Hypnosis 25, no. 3-4 (2008). As a caveat, earlier (pre-1990) findings of a link between hypnotisability and dissociative proneness (as opposed to fantasy proneness) have since been discounted.
39 A high-functioning creative state could be said to include a proclivity to fantasy proneness, absorption and imagination.
40 Pérez-Fabello and Campos, 39.
41 See Deeley et al.
Elise to a variety of painful procedures that included jabbing her with pins, inappropriate touching and verbal abuse. To all of this she remained unmoved, but when other researchers in the room subjected her to the same abuse, she reacted quickly and typically to the pain.

What is clear here, setting aside Bernheim’s ethical and moral culpability, is that Elise chose to interpret Bernheim’s deliberately open-ended instruction in a particular way, dissociating not only his visible presence (in accordance with his instruction ‘you will no longer see me’), but also the perception of the pain that he had inflicted upon her. It was up to Elise to choose how to interpret his instruction, and she responded creatively by extrapolating Bernheim’s presence to include the objects that he used to inflict pain on her.

While this kind of creative play might seem too subtle to be of much significance, it has been repeated in entirely different experiments involving hypnotised individuals in dissociated states, each of which reveal a diversity of creative strategies that validate and extend the experienced fantasy state. Each of these creative interventions is evidence of adaptive creative control, which is a key requirement of the condition of autonomy—essential in the formation and play of alter states in dissociative play.

Although it is not a question that needs to be answered to prove that it is possible, it is nevertheless interesting to speculate why a dissociated mind (induced by hypnosis or naturally occurring) determines to actively seek to maintain fantasy states. Exactly why it would do so, given how much mental effort is required in invigilation and creative manoeuvring to keep the fantasy from shattering, implies that it must be useful for the individual. Within the dissociative disorders discussed in the previous section, the maintenance of the fantasy state can be considered something of a survival mechanism, although it remains, even within the disorder, an imaginative strategy, as “the production of any personality with its own name and history implies the use of fantasy.”

It is important within this discussion to remember that acts of imagining and fantasising are not necessarily dissociative. If that were true, dissociative play could be rebadged as imaginative play, and the writing could end here. Dissociations are different, and the difference lies in the deeper level of disengagement.

What is being advocated here is not a survival mechanism, imaginative pathway, socially advantageous condition or therapeutic device, but a way of inducing a profound level of

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43 Ibid., 12.
detachment to permit a temporary removal of the self, allowing for the possibility of a broader subjective experience, or perhaps multiple subjectivities.

So, how might this fracture be safely provoked, setting aside traumatic interference? One way to do so may lie within hypnosis, specifically within the role that suggestion plays in ‘cueing’ particular responses. Hypnotic states are an ideal testing ground for this kind of speculation as they are strictly controlled (at least in the contemporary context), easy to measure (neurologically through brain scanning and by observation) and difficult to simulate.\textsuperscript{45}

Later in the thesis there will be an extended discussion of the use of self-hypnosis, self-suggestion and self-shaping in trance and states of possession, but for now the focus remains on externally induced phenomena and external suggestion. Although by definition dissociative play is a voluntary, self-induced practice, there is a similarity within both self-induced and externally induced modes of induction in the manner in which the subject is ‘tuned,’ and the reliance upon the willingness of the subject to voluntarily narrow and focus attention.\textsuperscript{46,47}

That willingness is to a large degree tethered to the subject’s inherent hypnotic suggestibility. As noted at the beginning of this section, some individuals are more suggestible than others, and as a result are more likely to be selected for experimental studies that involve hypnosis. The reason for their selection is pragmatic: they are easier to hypnotise, reach a deep level of conscious disengagement quickly, and when hypnotised take instruction well. Just how far these suggestible subjects can be manipulated to veer from what they might otherwise do in a fully conscious state is fascinating in itself (and the basis for hypnotism as entertainment), but what is more relevant here is the degree to which they willingly participate to ‘actively cope’ with externally implanted incongruence in the hypnotic state.\textsuperscript{48}

Here, in situations deliberately calculated to cause maximum cognitive stress, the hypnotised subject is asked to commit to an action that doesn’t fit the perceived circumstances in which they finds themselves. What emerges from the ensuing crisis of reasoning has implications for dissociative play, as it demonstrates the ingenuity possible in altered states of consciousness. Within these states, individuals fabricate details and offer irrational justifications to satisfy the demands of both the suggestion and the condition of the state, and in so doing, actively generate

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 8; Walsh et al., 34.
\textsuperscript{46} ‘Tuning,’ refers to the neurologic training required to enter a trance state, similar to the learnt ease at which a hypnotically suggestable subject enters hypnosis following subsequent successful attempts
\textsuperscript{47} Eugene Bliss, \textit{Multiple Personality, Allied Disorders, and Hypnosis} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
\textsuperscript{48} Braude, 9.
original creative strategies and convincingly self-deceive. They are, within what might appear to be fairly limiting situations, able to direct themselves away from what they would otherwise consciously do.

The crucial component in inducing this kind of outcome, apart from the requisite mind-state, is the implanted suggestion itself, which acts as a control mechanism, stimulating and regulating the creative leaps outside of the self that dissociative play encourages. It is with this in mind that the discussion now turns to the self-directed suggestions found in the minds of actors, in an analysis of dissociative states are inducible, self-manageable, and self-manipulable.

1.5 Actors as Alters: Triggering Response

All this scenery, props, make-up, costumes, the public nature of the creative moment – it’s all lies. I know that...But...if everything around me on stage were true...49

Here we consider the condition of acting beyond its capacity to merely simulate. Instead, an analysis of the development of a process termed by acting theorist Michael Chekhov as ‘divided consciousness’ is undertaken to measure its efficacy as a dissociative play strategy, a process that calls into being each of the critical psychological preconditions for dissociative play prefaced in previous sections: self-deception, absorption, malleability, suggestion and detachment.50

Within this section I contend that dissociative play can only occur when both mind and body are self-manipulated to act contrary to previously held positions. Within the realm of acting methodology, this is an idea that film and stage actors have trialled with mixed results since the pioneering work of Mikhail Shchepkin in the nineteenth century, and Constantin Stanislavski and Michael Chekhov in the early twentieth, offering actors the potential to temporarily and convincingly embody an imagined or scripted character through controlled, dissociated means.

The development of ‘divided consciousness’ as an acting methodology curiously parallels historic advances in the understanding of dissociation in clinical settings through the 20th century, but with surprisingly little interplay or even awareness of the other’s existence, despite their similarity.

Quite separate to the definition and treatment of dissociative disorders, and well before any acknowledgement of normative dissociations, the capacity of actors to dissociate was long understood and widely practiced as a technique. In the mid to late 20th century, acting theorist Michael Chekhov adapted the systematised approach of his one-time teacher Constantin Stanislavski to write a manual of original techniques to prepare actors to perform freely when in character, encouraging them to embed the characterisation in their psyche while simultaneously maintaining self-control, to enable a ‘truthful’ representation of the character portrayed.\(^5\) A shared concern of Stanislavski and Chekhov was that the life portrayed on stage “…must be convincing. It cannot flow amid palpable lies and deception. The lie must become or seem to be truth on the stage in order to be convincing.”\(^6\)

Chekhov developed the idea of a ‘divided consciousness’ to characterise the mental state required for such an undertaking, and its resemblance to not only dissociation but to the contemporary idea of ‘non-unitary mind’ is striking. The theory of non-unitary mind asserts that the mind is in fact always in a permanent state of fracture, not in any way singular, but fundamentally divided.\(^5\) Interestingly the theory intersects directly with Chekhov’s ‘divided consciousness’ in what each has to say about self-deception. Both argue that self-deception is a natural outcome of a split consciousness that is not aware of its fracture, one that allows it to be both deceiver and deceived. But while the theory of non-unitary mind maintains that such a condition only exists subconsciously, Chekhov contends that it can to be consciously willed and trained. Here, actors can consciously and willingly allow themselves to be fooled by the brain’s inability to accurately distinguish between actual and imagined memories, feelings, attitudes and processes. The condition allows the actor to genuinely feel, rather than simulate. Be, as opposed to act.

The relationship of divided consciousness to dissociative play lies not only in the dissociated state itself, but in mechanisms of control, strategy and training.

Strategies employed by Chekhov to induce divided consciousness were psycho-physical in nature, training body and mind to activate authentic expression, with consideration given to the maintenance of objective regulation.\(^5\) His predominantly physical techniques were designed to

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\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^5\) von Hippel and Trivers, 6.
\(^5\) Retaining objective control remains a key point of concern for actors and their critics, with actors such as Daniel Day-Lewis reprimanded for skirting too close to the edge of falling into their characterisations.
Rudolf Steiner was amongst the first to state that “the actor must not be possessed by his role”, quoted in: Chekhov, 155-6.
draw the actor away from their own nature and predilections, in opposition to Stanislavsky’s mind-centred approach where the actor instead focused on finding common ground between their own personal history and that of the character portrayed. Chekhov believed that Stanislavsky’s approach would gradually lead an actor to slip into a ‘degenerative’ state where their characterisations would be more like themselves than anything invented, a concern shared by dissociative play.\textsuperscript{55} Lee Strasberg’s well known acting theory ‘The Method’ is a refinement of Stanislavsky’s technique, and falls further from any practical application in the context of dissociative play by its dogmatic insistence on the use of ‘affective memory’ to transplant the actor’s own experiences and memories into the characterisation to instead simulate genuine felt emotion.\textsuperscript{56}

And while both dissociative play and divided consciousness use simulation in self-suggestive processes, detailed later in this section, simulation is not an intended expression of dissociative play. Simulation, like predilection, is in many ways a natural condition for actors and artists pretending to be people that they are not. To avoid it and emerge some distance from habitual subjectivity, Chekhov insisted that his psycho-physical strategies were enacted well before performance or even rehearsal, in a priming stage marked by self-suggestion.

Chekhov’s psycho-physical techniques demonstrate that for a willed dissociation to function - for it to remain self-deceptive, absorbed, malleable, suggestible, and detached - both mind and body are required to work as one. I detail the forms most relevant to dissociative play below.

Chekhov’s ‘playing the shape / feeling the form’ is the most dominantly physical of his psycho-physical method. It is a technique that involves imagining a physical shape for the characterisation that the actor wishes to inhabit, or a structure that the characterisation might fit inside, and physically rehearsing a bodily transformation to fit into that shape or structure.\textsuperscript{57} The legacy of routinely practising this technique is the embedding of a physical memory that is as real and recallable as any other. While in no way a literal animation of an imagined body, it functions well as a self-suggestive and self-deceptive apparatus that assists with knowing and feeling, and one that I have experimented with in the work ‘Kraken’, detailed in section 4.2.

Designed to skirt around predilection is Chekhov’s ‘asking questions and giving answers,’ also known as ‘leading questions’, in which motivation for a characterisation is revealed through an

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., xxvii.
\textsuperscript{56} Lee Strasberg and Lola Cohen, \textit{The Lee Strasberg Notes} (New York: Routledge, 2010).
imagined dialogue between the characterisation and the self.\textsuperscript{58} This process shares commonality with the interplay of host and alter in dissociative play. Chekhov felt that by engaging in this process, the body itself may respond physically at first, evident in small movements, before the mind had a chance to consciously imagine or verbalise a response.\textsuperscript{59} The significance of barely perceptible sub-conscious movements will be discussed in detail in the extended analysis of automatic and involuntary movement in section 3.4, but in the context here, it can be said simply that they play a disproportionally large role in the development of a character that feels real.

Chekhov’s most influential self-suggestive technique is the ‘psychological gesture’, in which a single, repeatable physical gesture is developed (often imagined through the ‘leading questions’ process), which, when performed, triggers a psychological response in the actor through association. This is a technique I have used with success in the development of the alter Kraken, in intensifying the feeling of his presence in my body. Its widespread success as a technique can also be measured by its continued practice in acting methodologies.\textsuperscript{60}

In a willing divided consciousness each of these psycho-physical strategies contributes to an actor gradually ‘becoming’ a character. Chekhov termed this feeling incorporation, which he described as a psycho-physical manifestation of a self-believed characterisation. It could also be called embodiment, and it is to this term, and its relationship to dissociative play, that we turn to next.

1.6 Embodied and Evasive Action

...our primary aim is to penetrate all of the parts of the body with fine psychological vibrations.\textsuperscript{61}

In this section the development of an embodied approach to alter creation within a dissociative play framework is considered in relation to the avoidance of culturally conditioned response.

First, a brief word on terminology. The terms incorporation and embodiment, introduced at the end of the previous section, to which we could add personification, are almost interchangeable in the context of the research here, as each describes the successful outcome of a transition to a whole of body, whole of mind acceptance of a particular position or identity. For the sake of

\textsuperscript{58}Chekhov, 96-7.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid. Practiced by actors including Anthony Hopkins, Jack Nicholson and Johnny Depp
\textsuperscript{61}Michael Chekhov, in Chekhov, 43.
clarity and contemporary currency, Chekhov’s term incorporation will be dropped here along with personification, leaving us with embodiment.

In measuring the success or otherwise of an embodied approach in the circumvention of cultural conditioned habitual behaviour, within the context of dissociative play, we need to consider externally observed changes in behaviour, individual self-reporting, and material outcomes made in character.

Here I contend that processes designed for self-displacement are enriched by an embodied approach, and are best measured by the distance the subject can spread between their own innate subjective leanings - their predilections, ways of moving in the world, expressions, feelings, even motivation - and those of the characterisation.

The whole of body, whole of mind acceptance of a characterisation that typifies embodiment in the realm of acting contributes to successful movements beyond the constraints of singular subjectivity largely because memory, the faculty of consciousness from which we habitually model the way we interact with the world, is to a significant degree held outside the brain, in the muscles and nerves that respond to external stimuli. Methods that draw the body and mind away from the conventions of learnt habitual muscular and neural reactions, such as hypnosis, noted in section 1.4, demonstrate this capacity well.

Evidence of the power of embodied approaches also appears within behavioural psychology in studies of the outward expression of embodied characterisation in self-deceptive scenarios. Self-deceivers share commonality with actors in that their body and mind are required to operate in tandem in the rehearsal and performance of physical and cognitive leaps that convince them of the truth of their self-deception.

Far from the realm of deception, Merleau-Ponty expands upon the potential of a bodymind to coerce changes in subjectivity when theorising about perception and bodily response, proposing a bodymind that determines ‘meaning in the moment through perception that is felt through body and mind together,’ in which primary expressions like felt language and bodily experience trump secondary expressions determined by cultural experience.64,65

63 von Hippel and Trivers, 6.
Embodiment, whether described by Merleau-Ponty or Chekhov, assists the subject/actor in the avoidance of secondary responses and expressions. For Chekhov, this side-stepping of the self is absolutely necessary in order to enable ‘truthful’ characterisation, to avoid the gradual degeneration of ability and potential that is a condition of habitual response.\footnote{Maurice Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012).}

The implications for subjective experience in a \textit{dissociative play} practice that incorporates an embodied approach are clear. Experience (feeling and memory) is not held only in the mind. Further, material action without a body is limited. If the body is taken along with the mind in the creation and actioning of alters/characters/personae, an expansive subjectivity awaits, which both body and mind experience together.

Embodied strategies, however, are not straightforward propositions. They are problematic in the demand they place on internal processing, for increased self-observation when the mind is supposed to be committed to the removal of ingrained, culturally-conditioned responses to the external world.

A solution to this issue intersects with much of what has been discussed here regarding self-suggestion, and it involves association.

\subsection*{1.7 To Suggest and Short-Circuit}

A way to ease the cognitive load caused by embodied approaches within a \textit{dissociative play} framework is to implant self-suggestive imagery in the mind that functions through association. Mel Gordon, in his introduction to Chekhov’s teachings, writes that Chekhov came to the same conclusion, embedding ‘images, especially visceral ones, that short-circuited complicated and secondary mental processes.’\footnote{Mel Gordon, in Chekhov, xxvii.}

Chekhov believed that the actor should train to transform the act of imagining/visualisation into a simple, logical process that could be willed into action when required. His strategy had a three-fold purpose: to clear the mind of personal, socio-cultural and habitual responses. Doing so allows room for increased self-observation - physically impacting the body - and grants the emotional associations developed in relation to the imagined images to become the base from which the actor draws characterisation, not the self. Paradoxically, though, the logical progression to this

\footnotetext[66]{Mel Gordon, in Chekhov, xxvii.\footnote{Ibid., xvii}}
strategy is for the actor to arrive at a point where the association *almost feels* personal, after becoming embedded in the psyche.

Images are more powerful than words in stimulating response in the actor.\(^{68}\) The visualisation of images that arouse genuine feeling have the same effect on bodily response as actual memories, but have the benefit of being potentially outside of the actor’s domain.

Evidence that supports the efficacy of the visual in coercing or stimulating thought and activity exists in other domains. Setting aside fictional instances of the use of imagery in psychological conditioning in films such as *The IPCRESS File, The Manchurian Candidate* or *A Clockwork Orange*, which play more to fears of the potential abuse of hypnotism, there are theories within realms as diverse as coercive behaviourism, marketing and cognitive neuroscience that demonstrate the resonance of image recall on subsequent thought, feeling and behaviour.

For relevance and evidentiary credibility, recent studies in cognitive neuroscience offer the most insight. Here, both brain imaging and observation have been used in studies to test whether real-time perception of external phenomena differs from the imaginative recall of it. Both brain imaging and observational study in this area arrive at the same conclusion, that the area of the brain that processes visual perception also processes the memory of it.\(^{69}\) What we can extrapolate from this is that if the visually-coded memory of perceptual experience has as much validity as the real-time experience of it, then memory, whether real, self-implanted (imagined) or coercively suggested, can, to a large degree, form and affect subjective experience.

In *dissociative play* scenarios within the visual arts, where image visualisation is ordinarily geared towards image generation, there is the potential to make a shift sideways into a domain where the visualisation is instead part of a self-suggestive imaginary complex designed to act as a memory bank to be used by the alter, inspiring genuine subjective response somewhere outside the artist’s own personal experience, increasing the likelihood of escaping the confines of the singular-self with its attendant baggage and restriction.


1.8 Building Dissociative Play

Here a summation of the prerequisite psychological conditions for dissociative play is presented based on findings in previous sections, and the formation of an ideal practice based on the operation of these conditions is articulated.

Dissociative Play questions whether contextual analysis from disciplines separate to the visual arts might assist in the development of a visual arts practice that uses alters and characterisations to expand subjective experience and enable a degree of autonomy in process and material outcome. Within the preceding sections of this chapter, an analysis of psychological conditions and strategies in approaches and disciplines as diverse as art fiction, neuroscience, behavioural psychology, clinical psychology and acting provide ample evidence that such a capacity already exists.

Drawing from these areas, we can conclude that in order for dissociative play to be actuated, the following conditions apply: the subject must be able to reach and maintain a mental state that is characterised by wilful absorption (a self-initiated narrowing of focus). This absorbed frame of mind is particularly susceptible to suggestion (self and externally implanted), and uses these suggestions to manoeuvre creatively in order to overcome reality/fantasy dissonance. The memory of self-embedded imagery in tandem with the rehearsal of psycho-physical simulation strategies allows the dissociative play alter to operate semi-autonomously from the host’s culturally-conditioned leanings and innate subjectivity. The detached condition of this alter state from that of the host subject is similar in autonomous, captioned operation to the state of self-deception.

When subjectivity is no longer singularly captioned by a bodymind’s memory of previously determined ways of thinking, feeling and behaviour, that bodymind is able to expand the number and variety of reactions to external stimuli and as a result create novel thoughts that may lead to unlikely, open-ended outcomes. When thinking of material outcomes for visual artists, works imagined or created in induced dissociative alter states have the potential to profoundly differ from not only those developed from within the artist’s innate subjectivity, but from any other alter state.

From here the discussion turns to an analysis of an existing form that appears to fulfil most of the criteria for dissociative play, but may in fact be something that sets our discussion on a different path. It is absorptive and wilful, reconciles fantasy/reality discord, requires a self-deceptive and
suggestible mind, yet is heavily externally regulated: the contemporary phenomena of pervasive play.

1.9 The Rules of the Game

In September 2012, as the half empty train in which I sat pulled into Ascot Vale Station, I looked up from a conversation I was having with my partner and kids and saw a young man standing motionless on the platform. He was dressed like the character Neo from the film The Matrix, head bowed, in a large black vinyl overcoat and sunglasses. As the train came to a stop he stepped forward with purpose and yanked open the door. It was then that I noticed his gun. For the next three stops I kept my eyes on him, on the hands that gently held the realistic looking weapon, at the statuesque posture unmoved by the rattling of the carriage, his presence only metres away, while my heart raced out of control. I pondered a number of options— to ignore him and hope for the best, tackle him to the floor, or just laugh at his get-up. I chose to ignore him. The problem, as I speculated later, was that I was unable to distinguish between the fantasy and reality of his condition, and my concern at the time, particularly as my family was travelling alongside, was that he was unable to either.

What I had seen was likely a participant in what is termed pervasive play. My lack of awareness of this particularly potent subgenre of play had no doubt contributed to my fear, and as it happened he soon left the train without incident.

Pervasive play is an umbrella term that covers an abundance of ‘mixed reality’ play activities (Live Action Role Play (LARP), Urban Superhero Play, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), immersive gaming, hybrid gaming) that are distinguished by their staging in mixed reality play environments. These environments fuse play activity in everyday spaces to activity in virtual worlds, where the hunt for clues, the establishment of rules and the nature of missions is heavily regulated by the game’s maker. Pervasive play games are similar in some ways to the role-playing games of earlier generations, of Dungeons and Dragons and the like, but differ in the way they force players outside of their bedrooms and table-top surfaces into a wider reaching interaction with the ‘real world’ with the help of mobile technologies and encouraging of intense social interactivity.\(^{70}\)

For now I’d like to focus on a subgenre of pervasive play known as *immersive gaming*, a contentious offshoot that has drawn criticism for the very reason that marks its relevance to the research, namely, the voluntary creation of mission-orientated alter personae in ‘psychologically susceptible’ individuals who on the surface at least appear to struggle to differentiate between reality and projected fantasy.71

*This is not a game*. It’s the tagline of a generation of online immersive games (from 2000 to the present day) that encourage players to reach a deep level of absorption in an environment where the usually visible signs of a game, those indicators that demarcate the boundaries between reality and play environments, including the identities of the makers themselves, are carefully hidden, almost invisible.

Though immersive gaming differs from most other forms of pervasive play by the absence of any requirement to dress and act out the personality of the game character, it is offset by the required movement of players through real and online worlds that acts as a kind of fantasy-as-reality induction process, and provides motivation. The layers of similitude encountered by players in these environments are sophisticated and powerfully suggestive, often cleverly disguised as apparent game design components deliberately placed for players to ‘accidentally’ discover (‘secret’ webpages, leaking of apparently real game data and hacked game designer identities, clues left in graffiti in public bathrooms), which act as external suggestive devices that reinforce the game’s reality.

This type of immersive play is brought to life by the self-deceptive capacity of players to maintain the integrity and continuance of the game at all costs, despite often discovering evidence (real, not planted) that could very easily fracture the illusion. They remain consciously aware that they are participating in a game, but compartmentalise that awareness to extend the duration of the fantasy state.

Despite cycles of media hysteria concerning the potential of pervasive players to be lost forever to grip of the immersive game, their willing participation and self-aware maintenance of the game’s parameters suggests that this is an unlikely outcome. The self-conscious nature of their involvement, when paired to the absorption experienced within the immersive, multi-layered gaming environment, alongside player openness to suggestibility, instead suggests that immersive gaming may in fact be closer to *dissociative play* than any kind of permanent self-fracture.

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71 Ibid., 2.
There is a problem here, however, with specifically designating this activity as dissociative play. The issue resides in the measuring of the immersive gamer’s experience of altered subjectivity in an immersive game environment that overtly denies full agency. To what degree are players able to act as autonomous characters of their own imagining in terms of thought, feeling and behaviour given the amount of external control over movement, especially when partnered to the lack of self-suggestive mechanisms in these games, such as physical dress-up and characterised performance?

In attempting to answer that question, let’s shift sideways to consider a distant relative in the extended family of pervasive play, Live Action Role Play (LARP), in which players experience a greater freedom of self/world movement and expression in a partially self-regulated game environment. Here, players work for months preparing costumes, organisers design elaborate and convincing scenography, all for a very short period of engagement. In the dominant Nordic configuration of LARP, gameplay rules are either non-existent or very minimal; players are expected to improvise in a manner ‘appropriate’ to their invented character, the play environment and other players. An event or mystery story line is usually imposed to provide inspiration, and some might argue, direction. Players typically dress and act in Tolkien-inspired, post-apocalyptic or animal character (‘furry’) attire, often with weaponry, but don’t necessarily engage in the mock-battling found in medieval re-enactment, instead engaging in character-specific dialogue and communal activity that aids in the delivery of specific narrative events (fig. 1.3).

Judging by the volume of writing devoted to almost every aspect of the subject from etiquette to weaponry to optimal psychology, LARP players and observers appear to spend as much time theorising about its significance as engaging in practice. Among a plethora of ongoing debates, one of the most heated surrounds the level of immersion players experience within the game environment— to what extent they inhabit their roles, and it is to this question that the research here applies.

According to Lauri Lukka, the deep state of immersion reached by LARP players is equivalent to a temporary state of dissociation, enabled by an initial internal narrowing of focus during character development that in turn assists in lowering inhibition (contributing to a wider range of expressions outside ordinary potential), paired to a ‘self-reinforcing confirmation-bias’ during gameplay that favours the perception of elements that reinforce the fantasy state and exclude

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periphery signs that indicate fabrication. Within this immersive character state, Lukka contends that the self temporarily disappears as a result of the impossibility of simultaneously experiencing character and non-character states, then reappears during moments of conscious awareness of game parameters, then disappears again, and so on, as part of an ever-fluctuating “continuum rather than binary state.”

Others reject not just that notion, but the very possibility of character immersion. “A banana is still very much a banana, even though we pretend that it is a gun, a phone or a kiwi,” offers LARP theorist Andreas Lieberoth, denying the possibility of genuine self-escape or subjective expansion in a condition he feels is more pretend play than willed dissociation.

Keeping both of these positions in mind, and taking into consideration the limited agency available in immersive gaming, we return to the question of the mutability of subjectivity in these pervasive play forms. How much can one expect to lose themselves in these types of activities? The answer, disappointingly, is not very much. The parameters of each game, while almost invisible, simply don’t allow room for it, and neither do the players, who seem more interested in social exchange and mission fulfilment. They are, after all, engaged in gameplay, in deceptions that can’t help to shift subjectivity. What players experience psychologically in these settings is not particularly dissociative, and has more in common with the deep immersion of Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory, which describes the experiential euphoria that occurs when a deeply immersed subject becomes wedded to their activity.

The constraints on dissociative creativity within self-aware and rule-bound pervasive play models are compounded by their communal structure. To get people to work together to make something happen inevitably involves rules and regulation, and these impede free movement.

Perhaps then, at this juncture, an addendum needs to be added to the optimal criteria for dissociative play: it must be a condition formed and executed by an individual, operate free of communal exchange with other players, and ideally lack any pre-determined outcome. It must not be held within an externally imposed deceptive structure, or require belief to be affected. Additionally, the structure requires suggestive components that are orientated towards reinforcing its reality.

It is clear that expecting an externally generated and highly regulated play environment to fulfil each of these criteria is unreasonable. To find where this movement is more likely, indeed limitless, we need to leave externally directed conditional characterisation behind, and consider the position of a character as the author of their own narrative, in scenarios where author, self and character become entangled.

In the next chapter, the self-initiated, self-shaped characterisations that are demanded of dissociative play are addressed through an analysis of these author-as-character strategies, in literature, film and music. Here, the will of the author and that of their characterised presence can be very easily decoupled, enabling a fluid subjective agency at the expense of genuine self-representation, offering a variety of self-shaping on-paper models that a visual artist might co-opt into dissociative strategies.
Figure 1.1. Visitors interact with what they believe is an ongoing assessment of discovered artefacts in Iris Häussler’s *He Named Her Amber*.

Figure 1.2. Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera’s *Centaurus Neandertalensis* from the series ‘Fauna’


This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons
Figure 1.3. A group engaged in a structured *Vampire* LARP event, Poland, 2016

https://nordiclarp.org/2016/12/06/white-wolfs-convention-of-thorns/
2. Alter Agents: Creators as Characters within Dissociative Play

In the previous chapter, the psychological conditions necessary for dissociative play were detailed, beginning with an initial emphasis on the pathological appearance of dissociation, bridging to a discussion of the potential for aspects of that pathology to be co-opted into a willing strategy. Here the writing turns to an analysis of representations of that strategy in literature, film, performance art and music, examining the dissociative play of creators in the development and release of characters that appear to represent them. Throughout this chapter, I argue that these characters, while seemingly carrying the voice of their creator, speak from a different place—a position of relative autonomy where their influence can shape narrative direction, reroute the will of their creator, and possibly allow for the experience of alternate subjectivities.

Within this chapter a case is made for the transferability of creator/self-representation decoupling strategies from representations in writing and performance across to dissociative play visual arts settings, where potential outcomes are more material than necessarily representational, while acknowledging that there remains a space somewhere between representation and material actuality where a self-characterisation might also be subjectively experienced.

The chapter begins, however, with a stumbling block: the difficulty of overcoming conventions of self-representation within the visual arts, where identity is represented or constructed through the self-portrait as a declaratory authorial strategy, a constrictive mode that denies multiple and amorphous characterisations of the self. This convention is set against strategies in other disciplines that aim for a wider self/creator/character movement, disciplines that are far less preoccupied with truth telling, or notions of authorial governance.

The discussion then moves to an analysis of the use by authors of self-characterisation modalities within fictional settings, evident in literary techniques in play since the early seventeenth century, in which the freedom to think, speak, feel and act exist within the mind of an imagined self.

Dissociative techniques developed by authors in post-modern literature and film to de-couple themselves from their characterised self-representations are then considered, in an examination
of the relevance to the research of four critical modes: *autofiction, self-insertion, author surrogacy and author avatar*.

The writing then shifts to an analysis of contemporary, somewhat constrained fictional self-representation strategies within the visual arts, where artists document what could be described as *dissociative play* activity in performing or representing characterised self-depictions—stretching and remoulding but not entirely fracturing authorial control and identity.

Following that discussion, the research considers the potential danger of self-reflexivity in characterised self-representation, a persistent post-modern affliction that threatens the viability of *dissociative play* by creating endless loops of internal referencing that leads the self-characterisation only back to the self.

The chapter closes with a case study of the *dissociative play* phenomenon *black metal*, an extreme sub-genre of heavy metal music that uneasily navigates the representation of creator/characters discussed earlier in the chapter, and something else entirely— their living, breathing actuality, providing not only a model for alternate subjective experience, but a beginning point for an examination of states of identity bleed.

### 2.1 A Vessel for Carriage

The discussion begins within the conventions of the self-portrait, and opens with a question for *dissociative play*: how might it be possible to genuinely represent the subjective experience of an *alter* persona state in a visual arts setting where self-representations - realistic and characterised - are constricted by the necessity of convincingly asserting one’s identity? Regardless of whether that assertion is a representation of the artist’s social, personal, cultural or political position, the represented self is, and has always been in the visual arts, a vessel for carriage— of the impact of the world upon its particular subjectivity.

Here I contend that visual artists engaged in *dissociative play* can avoid this convention and instead represent the subjective experiences of their *alter* selves by modelling the kinds of author-as-character strategies that have for centuries flourished in other creative domains.

Within the visual arts the self-portrait is a peculiarly adept mechanism for an artist’s identity conveyance. It is so reliable, in fact, that even an artist’s fictional self-characterisation tends to be interpreted as a kind of cloaked self-revelation. The idea that an artist might try to bypass the idea of representing their self-identity altogether, and instead represent themselves as something
that they are not, may well seem absurd and impossible to realise. But as I will outline over the coming sections, it is well within reach.

The stigma of the genuine prevails in self-portraiture regardless of the degree to which the represented self is constructed, fabricated or embellished. These representations are, after all, trying to say the same thing: this is who I am (or want to be), and this is what I stand for. The need for artists to reassert this mantra is in part a legacy of the 20th century’s obsession with self-portraiture - a fascination with identity shared equally by artists and audiences - and a vestige of Romanticism’s call for singular and visionary self-assertion. But there is little reason for it to remain so in an age of plurality and authorial decay.

That doesn’t mean that the self-portrait needs to be thrown away altogether. In fact, there are ways in which both the outward symbolic resonance and internal self-constructive mechanisms at play in the self-portrait might be useful when considering how an alter characterisation might be represented in a dissociative play context.

The resemblance of something akin to a self-likeness may be beneficial to dissociative play in the way in which it speaks to audiences, working within but not necessarily constricted by the convention. By hitching itself to the emphatic character of the self-portrait, a representation from outside the self has the ability to carry a similar expressive force, in the simulation of all that is genuine, singular and stable. Speaking a language that is known and encouraged, but developed from outside the self rather than within, the dissociative play alter-representation gains a primed audience ready to receive it unconditionally.

The construction of identity at the heart of the self-portrait offers another advantage for representations outside of the self. The internal self-conditioning that is the beginning point for artists in self-representations is already a fictionalisation of subjectivity, a simulation device that encourages speculation about the constructed identity’s feelings and circumstances. In a dissociative play practice, the arena of the self-portrait offers room for play with these feelings and circumstances, where their customary simulation can be extended to an experiential condition.

In section 2.7 I discuss this very condition, in investigating the potential of visual artists to roam as characters within their works, experiencing the world from beyond their ordinary capacity, documenting their experiences and constructing alter- self-portraits, for want of a better term. The lack of existing terminology to describe this way of working is revealing, as it points to the paucity or under-reporting of its prevalence in the visual arts.
In other creative domains, however, this way of working flourishes, and terminology that attempts to capture the many evolutions of its appearance abound. Over the next five sections, the most relevant of these manifestations as they appear in literary fiction will be analysed to determine transferability to dissociative play representations in the visual arts, within the alter-self-portraits of writers who engage in dissociative play practices that skirt around the archaic institution of the self-portrait, while still appearing to fill the measure of it.

2.2 Agency and the Dissociated Author

Dissociations are the swings in the playground of modern fiction that allow authors to represent themselves as characters that they are intrinsically not.

Writers of fiction have danced around the notion of authentic self-representation since the early seventeenth century, building narratives that include self-characterisations that are both like and unlike their ordinary selves, bringing to life an active, displaced agency where authorial control over narrative is shared with the motivation and movement of the author’s self-characterisation.

The dissociation of the author in practice and representation developed as a natural consequence to orthodoxies of narrative, which require authors to submit to either first or third person pronoun in describing thoughts and events. The self-represented author is present within each of these modes as an observer of events or as a character that has a part to play. The first person singular pronoun (‘I’) has proven the most expedient for authors seeking to insert themselves as agents in their works, while the third person pronoun has, in postmodern literature, allowed the author to become a characterised representation. Within each of these approaches, the position of the author as a purely impartial observer of actions and events seems an unnecessary encumbrance upon all that might be possible with narrative and is usually avoided. The author-as-character strategy may still allow an author to have a genuine self-like voice, but in addition to this capacity, as we will see over the following sections, the opportunity exists for authors to dissociate their self-representations, performing acts of dissociative play to separate their own agendas from those of their self-representation, and create unlikely narrative along the way.

In their simplest form, dissociations within fictional literary formations are embedded as narratives devices rather than conscious strategies of self-removal. Consider Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a gothic novella literally configured by
the nineteenth century’s interest in the possibility of double consciousness.\textsuperscript{76} Within the story, Jekyll experiments with drugs to induce the character Hyde to emerge from his psyche as a means of agential emancipation, but quickly loses control over his creation as Hyde wreaks havoc in Jekyll’s world. The negative narrative trajectory speaks to late nineteenth century fears of science’s role in the potential corruption of singular, fixed, stable consciousness, and warns of the danger of dissociating a free-roaming amoral consciousness.\textsuperscript{77}

While affording conscious autonomy to a character bifurcated from the creator-self in \textit{Jekyll and Hyde} seems to come entirely at the expense of the agency of the creator, it could be inversely interpreted as an agential expansion for the author: while Jekyll unleashes a characterised beast from the self that is impossible for him to contain, it develops autonomous narrative potential for Stevenson.

Most contemporary literary configurations of dissociation and split consciousness work somewhat differently. Rather than situating dissociated characters within scenarios to raise questions of autonomy and agency, authors instead choose to dissociate \textit{themselves} within their own narratives to test the capacity for movement outside the self as a matter of \textit{practice}.

The devices used by authors to insert and release themselves as autonomous figures within narrative structures are complex and many. And although it’s worth noting that each of these is a meta-strategy, in that the fiction of the author as character is spliced within an existing fiction, there exists room for more than meta-play: a kind of non-fiction may occur in characterised self-representations where the author has the potential to become lost altogether in the narrative, entangled by characterisation and scenarios to the point where a possibility emerges for a representation ‘outside the self,’ a removal of the author from the characterised representation, and the liberation of form.

It could be argued that such a capacity readily exists for authors who simply invent characters and grant space for them to develop as autonomous beings. But to deliberately place a character that holds a likeness to the self within a narrative does much more, as it calls into question – quite literally – the command of the author in the development of narrative, while opening a psychology in which one might \textit{experience} an unlikely subjectivity, rather than just \textit{imagine}.

\textsuperscript{76} Robert Louis Stevenson, \textit{The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Tales of Terror} (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

\textsuperscript{77} Notwithstanding the entirely separate debate as to whether that consciousness is simply a representation of the creator’s subliminal desires.
It is to the variety of approaches that authors choose to enact this potential, and their relationship to the practice and representation of dissociative play, that the writing next attends.

2.3 Autofiction

The following sections 2.3-2.6 detail four literary practices in which authors represent themselves as active agents, some autonomously, others less so: autofiction, self-insertion, author surrogacy and author avatar. Each is analysed within the context of dissociative play and with potential transferability to a visual arts setting in mind.

The first of these is autofiction, a term in currency since its genesis in the late 1970s in the writing of Serge Doubrovsky.78 Autofiction is a literary form that combines elements of autobiography and fiction, materialising in imagined and genuinely recalled accounts of memories typically written in the first person singular pronoun, often adopting a non-fictional format like a memoir, diary or autobiography.

Though it bears outward similarity to the controversial faction (fiction masquerading as historic fact) and pseudo-biography, autofiction is unique in the way it advances truth-telling and self-searching in a format whose apparent realism is as constructed as any narrative.

Within autofiction authors use themselves as the primary vehicle for story-telling, and while the mode seems an ideal space for deception and reader manipulation, the force with which autofictive authors cannon themselves into searing, unblemished accounts of their personal and creative lives denies any such interpretation. What is most interesting within these very real tragedies (and they usually are) is the degree to which the authored self appears to get to a kind of truth through all of the stories that it tells itself, or has others tell about it. Jonathon Sturgeon writes that ‘the self is... a living thing composed of fictions,’ suggesting that subjectivity is as much conditioned by invented narrative and characterisation as it is by the real circumstances in which we find ourselves, a notion that autofictive authors take as their testament.79

Although autofiction credits the creator-as-character practice of dissociative play as an already existing, everyday phenomenon, navigated particularly well by artists and writers without the

need for any special intervention or management, it is limited in autonomous reach. The hand of the autofictive writer is straight and true, pockmarked by experience and tuned to recall, but it is not a hand that can play, nor can it aid the writer in any deferral of control. In fact, the often prosaic narratives of autofiction seem to limit authorial invention altogether.

What remains valuable however is autofiction’s feigning of the ‘vehicle of carriage’. Within it the author can choose to rest, prone to the vagaries of the existence they depict, or drive themselves into slightly more dangerous territory.

Where this unstable path may take the author can be seen most clearly in autofictive meta-narrative film. While meta-narratives within autofictive literature are avoided by contemporary authors (by their association with post-modernism, and their potential to muddy ‘truth-telling’) within autofictive film they are an accepted means of self-consciously acknowledging the wobbly condition of truth in self-representational narrative construction.

In film, autofictions typically manifest as mockumentaries. Here, the vehicle of carriage is the truth-bearing documentary format, in which the author or director is often depicted as a helpless tragicomic victim of the permutations of their own narrative invention. In mockumentaries like Werner Herzog’s autofictive Incident at Loch Ness (fig. 2.1), Herzog plays himself as a director in a documentary-style recreation of a series of events that never took place. In it, Herzog’s character does not appear to exercise the same level of control or impartiality that is typical of autofiction in the literary sense; instead, he finds himself pushed and pulled by his own narrative, in a blur of confusion as to his complicity in the events depicted.

What literary and filmic autofictions share is a delight in the figurative torture of the author, and it is within this ‘death play’ that visual artists engaged in dissociative play may find a way to represent themselves as characterised figures. The absence of representations of control and authority over narrative direction point at the very least to the possibility that the characterised creator is as much invented and at the mercy of circumstance as other invented forms and characters, and that within a different format, one that steps out from the bounds of representation and into embodiment, the potential exists for the characterised self to experience an altered subjectivity, pushed into by the self but not entirely controlled by it.

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80 Incident at Loch Ness, directed by Werner Herzog and Kitana Baker (California: 20th Century Fox, 2005), DVD.
In the following section the distinction between the creator’s voice and that of the characters is widened even further, though muddied at times, in an analysis of the literary technique of self-insertion.

2.4 Self-Insertion

Self-insertion is a literary technique deliberately designed to arouse author/character conflict. Within this mode, a disguised representation of the author is inserted within a contentiously realistic narrative, often in an account of verifiable historic events. That character, however, differs from autofictive self-representations in two critical ways: the character is not the narrator, and their position and influence within the events described is either entirely fabricated or at the least exaggerated.

What occurs in the mind of the author in the development of the narrative and the reader who follows it is remarkably similar— a distinct dissociation occurs between the author and their characterised self-representation. It is difficult, almost impossible, to consider both at the same time. Instead both reader and author flick between the two, pausing only to consider their similarity. Of course, this is contingent on a pre-awareness that the characterisation exists altogether, as the mask that the author places over the characterised self-representation often convincingly hides the author.

Importantly, the dissociations arrived at through self-insertion are as much experiential as they are representational for the author, as the play of self-characterisation within this approach is particularly prone to author manipulation. The strings that bind author to self-representation within narratives of self-insertion are long and barely visible, permitting the author room to move outside the reader’s expectation of their involvement and their own subjective habit, allowing for a divergent self-experience that is at the centre of dissociative play.

The potential for a radically dissociative self-presence is enacted in Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse 5, in which the author appears as a minor character in a POW camp, in a series of circumstances that bear a striking similarity to the author’s own experiences during the bombing of Dresden (including the name of the building in which Vonnegut was held, the ‘Slaughterhouse 5’). The awareness by the reader of Vonnegut’s self-insertion as a sick POW is revealed by the

81 “Kurt Vonnegut: The bombing of Dresden and the creation of ‘Slaughterhouse 5,” Paul Gallagher, accessed 7 February 2017,
anonymous narrator, who says of the character “That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book.” Whether the narrator is identifying the character as the author or the character as the narrator is unclear, but the destabilising effect upon the singular command of the author is striking, stimulating speculation as to continuity and direction.

A roman à clef (novel with a key) is a variant of the self-insertion strategy that works in reverse: in Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar, a thinly veiled fiction, her characters act as stand-ins for the author and her acquaintances in real life. The speculative awareness by the reader of the narrow gap between the fiction of the characters’ circumstances in the novel, and the historical and very personal reality of their relationship to the author’s life causes a schism in the fiction and places the author – inverting the fantasy-within-reality approach of Vonnegut’s self-insertion – in a similarly precarious position.

Each of these strategies offer the author a destabilising psychology in which the act of imagining a position for the self within narrative is as potent as any genuine, named involvement. But might this be usurped when an author adopts self-insertion and uses their name?

2.5 Author Surrogates

The author surrogate mode employs exactly that approach. It is a technique of characterised self-representation where a fictionalised version of the author, sharing the author’s name, is a prominent or main character within a narrative, and sometimes also the narrator.

In Bret Easton Ellis’ author surrogate novel Lunar Park, Easton Ellis appears as a character who is also an author – and the narrator of the novel – sharing some of Easton Ellis’ actual history. The character, like the author, is a bestselling author whose literary and personal background is one of early success and mid-career crisis. From his position as author, main character and narrator, Easton Ellis initially revels in the parodic play of picking apart his own career, before his self-representation takes a dramatic turn away from the self and toward characterisation, in narrated circumstances that appear more obviously fictional. As his character’s world begins to

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break apart, Easton Ellis the author disappears altogether and is replaced by a characterised representation that exists far from his lived experience.

What is most revealing in the author surrogate approach of *Lunar Park* is the transition of the self-representation to an externally operant characterisation, one that is marked explicitly through the narrative, and bears an uncanny resemblance to the invention and maintenance of *dissociative play* alter personae.

In author surrogate, self-insertion and *dissociative play* modes, it is absolutely necessary to invent a suggestive scenario or setting in which the transition away from habitual self-representation and conditioned response is encouraged. Whether developing an *alter* persona in *dissociative play* or characterised self-representation in an author surrogate or self-insertion literary fiction, the absence of this self-suggestive environment makes the task of transitioning outside the self almost impossible, serving only to reinforce the author’s singularly subjective voice.

This kind of difficulty is evident in the autofictive mode, when the self-representation is limited by the recollection of memory, whether confabulated or otherwise. A separate, though equally difficult task is ahead of the final self-representational literary mode to be discussed next, one that provides the requisite suggestive fictional setting, but insists on a further assertion of authorial singularity and control.

### 2.6 Author Avatars

The last variant of characterised self-representation to be discussed is the least effective in releasing the characterised *alter* from the author *host*. It is the figure of the *author avatar* or *raisonneur*, in which a fictionalised version of the author voices the author’s own opinion, advancing thematic content from within the narrative of the work and calling judgement upon the actions of other characters. Traditionally the raisonneur was simply the ‘voice of reason,’ however the definition has expanded into a voice that is more critical, sometimes over- emphasising the moral ambition of the author.\(^{86,87}\)


The mask that the author employs as author avatar is wafer thin, almost transparent, and its resemblance to its creator so lifelike that any self-movement is strictly inhibited, rendering it less useful in the context of *dissociative play*.

### 2.7 The Artist as Character

Judging by the quantity and range of literary fictional self-representational strategies detailed previously, one could justifiably conclude that author-as-character strategies are now common to the point of trope in literature, but within the visual arts, where the practice and representation of dissociation is yet to gain traction, they are conspicuously absent.

The most significant barrier to the development of characterised self-representation in the visual arts was touched on earlier in the discussion of self-portraiture’s *vehicle of carriage*—specifically in the dominance of identity assertion in self-representation. This *modus operandi* is almost wholly responsible for the current scarcity of fictionalised self-representations in the visual arts, but is amplified by an interpretative malaise that fails to acknowledge characterised self-representations even when they do appear.

This kind of misinterpretation is clearly evident in critical evaluations of the fictionalised self-representational photographs of Cindy Sherman (fig. 2.2), where discussion is generally limited to a determination of what aspect of herself (or what stereotypic or archetypal representation of women) she is attempting to represent, rather than the act of embodiment or shifts toward fictionalised self-characterisation. The idea that Sherman may in fact be experimenting with the lived experience of multiple subjectivities is not usually considered.

The primacy and expediency of figurative imagery in identity politics must also bear some responsibility for the restricting of interpretation within characterised self-representation to identity construction. As we will see next, in visual art forms where the *image* of the self is instead *absent*, new ways of interpreting self-movement abound.

The freedom afforded visual artists who avoid figurative self-imagery, but who remain active in the field of fictionalised self-representation can be found in the life and work of Sophie Calle. While not dissociative in operation, the manner in which Calle pursues the goal of becoming a person of her own imagining enables a similar self-fracture and freedom of movement to the sovereignty afforded the individual in *dissociative play*, and could be defined as dissociative in outcome.
Calle’s works are governed by self-imposed rules that limit her ability to act in a disengaged fashion, allowing the circumstances in which she places herself to forcefully act upon her. The shedding of authorial control that occurs as a consequence is liberating for Calle, as it frees her work from herself, enabling distance, room for movement outside habit and predilection—an agential expansion.

While Calle’s dissociative play often involves the removal of the self without any need for character embodiment, there are distinct and telling exceptions. Her collaboration with the author Paul Auster in the work Double Game is an elaborate self-removal stratagem that enables the reclamation of agency, in the experience of an altered subjectivity within a ‘self’ that is at once very much and very unlike her own.88 The work has its beginning in Auster’s novel Leviathan, where the character ‘Marie’, modelled on Calle herself, is an artist living a regulated existence carrying out actions that Calle performed historically, alongside other actions wholly invented by Auster. Calle made a decision to test the legitimacy of Auster’s factional representation of her by recreating the contrived artworks from the novel, living and working as ‘Marie,’ eventually condensing these into the book Double Game (fig. 2.3) which depicts these ‘inventions’ alongside Calle’s artistic projects depicted by Auster in the novel.89,90 What happens to Calle’s identity (let alone Marie’s) through the process is hard to discern, beyond noting that a shift in identity from self to characterisation has taken place. Somewhere within the narrative of action Calle has lost herself, and found another (or many others) - gaining agency at the expense of a moribund singular subjectivity.

It is not just in Double Game that Calle arrives at this position, as much of her oeuvre attempts to do the same, and the manner in which it does has much in common with the condition of autofiction. Within both modes, a kind of truth is peddled—of the lived experience of the characterisation.

Each relies upon the relinquishing of authorial control within a highly self-aware structure. Earlier in the writing I asked, without giving an answer, how an artist might arrive at a condition outside the self from within a visual art context that requires a continuum of self-conscious awareness. Perhaps the answer lies in autofiction, in a truth-telling format where the recollection of the author’s characterised relationship with the world muffles the author’s own voice. It is in the demarcation of operative boundaries that the author’s voice is segmented, cut away, permitting

89 Belc, 66.
90 Calle and Auster.
artists like Calle a psychology that is ready to experience an alternate subjectivity, rather than just speculate its possibility.

There is one distinct advantage that visual artists have over writers working in this modality, and it involves the potential generation of material from outside the self while inside the characterised consciousness. While I delve into this area in detail in the last chapter of the writing, *The Material Aftermath of Dissociative Play*, what follows here is a contextual analysis of material generation as it relates to autofiction, through the lens of Patrick Pound’s decade-long deceptive *Artist Project/CV* (fig. 2.4).91

Within *Artist Project/CV*, Pound experiments with autofiction and self-insertion in the covert creation of an *alter* self-representation for generative ends. Pound is of course no stranger to systems of generation, frequently inventing perverse games of logic that require him to collect, arrange and redistribute textual and photographic material. But in this particular work he steps outside himself and into the character ‘Patrick Pound’, creating a generative autofictive automaton.

*Patrick Pound* is an artist who shares the same name as Pound but is an entirely fictional creation. Pound began by inserting references to the fictional *Patrick Pound* in biographic dictionaries, manipulating the vanity press system to net *Patrick Pound* a swag of spurious awards, accreditations and entries, some of which he has paid for, others apparently autonomously generated as a result of *Pound’s* growing stature in the biographical dictionary world. *Patrick Pound* now has a substantial fictional presence in a space where he should not be able to roam. *Artist Project/CV* runs the risk of being restricted to satirical interpretation – as a criticism of narcissistic, poorly regulated sham factual systems, but it has allowed Pound the space to not only imagine what an *alter* self might be capable of, but materially generate it through apparent factual entries.

It is in the generation of material documentation where an autofictive characterisation leaves literary speculative practices far behind. Whereas literary devices designed to bifurcate author and self-representation are limited to addressing the position of the author in relation to textual narrative, within the visual arts, as evidenced by the autofictions of Calle and Pound, there is scope for expanding that narrative position into material production. Here, the generative potential of the creator-as-character is realised, in a psychology that *appears* to operate inside

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the habit of self-representation, making, moulding and shaping in the presumed likeness of the self, while surreptitiously producing from the imagined mind of another.

The artist's experience of dissociation in this productive frame occurs as an outcome of documentary representation, partly through the invention of a character that happens to share the artist's name, and in the generation of material that substantiates that character's existence. This experience contrasts with the possibility of a real-time lived experience of altered subjectivity in dissociative play that has dominated earlier discussion. But regardless of means, both representation and practice serve the same crucial purpose, and are equally successful in getting to the same end: of drawing the artist away from the self and into unfamiliar territory.

But attempting it through autofiction comes with the danger that the self simply falls for its own reflection, into a pool of narcissism, self-reflexivity and habit. In the next section, these dangers and limitations are discussed further, turning again to literary fiction in an analysis of avoidance strategies.

2.8 Self-Characterisation: Limit and Risk

'Think what it would be to have a work conceived from outside the self, a work that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language, to the bird perching on the edge of the gutter, to the tree in spring and the tree in fall, to stone, to cement, to plastic...\(^{92}\)'

What barriers stand in the way of a characterised self-representation overcoming Calvino’s limited perspective of the individual ego?

Self-characterisations run the risk of becoming ineffectual dissociative play strategies as a result of the self-reflexive actions of their creators. These problems result from introspective characterisation—imagining the character as an extension of the self, rather than as a separate entity. The merging of creator and character limits free movement, engages old habits, and encourages inward speculation at the expense of treading new ground. What emerges in terms of documentary material from this amalgamated self/characterisation generation is self-reflexive, possibly self-parodic, dulling the potential of the characterisation to fully leave the self and emerge somewhere outside of it.

Narratives in which the author, artist or director appears as a character seeking to drive events face a challenge in surmounting self-reflexivity. Martin Amis writes of the self-reflexive dilemmas encountered by writers using themselves as characters to bemoan the difficulties of writing, ironically, as a struggling writer in the author surrogate novel *The Information*, and he is not alone in that predicament.93

Self-reflexivity is commonplace in contemporary literature as a result of the awkward position of the author in relation to postmodern narrative structures, where self-conscious attempts to maintain breaks in the *Fourth Wall* - that imaginary curtain behind which characters and audiences live in the illusion that the circumstances portrayed are real – requires a constant signalling of the author’s presence. Within these narratives the author faces their readership front on, acknowledging their complicity in events depicted, leaving little room for movement.

How writers avoid self-reflexivity in postmodern literary narratives but retain themselves as active characters is straightforward: they bury every trace of authorial presence, and instead rely on autonomous or semi-autonomous characterisations. The inserted character may share the author’s name, history and personal circumstances, but the gulf between the actions of that character and the position of the author is too large for them to be considered one and the same.

Literary equivalents prior to the onset of postmodernism also abound, particularly in gothic literature, where authorial play with multiple narrators is common. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, for example, four fictional narrators work together to avoid any likelihood of the author revealing her presence.94 The first, known only as ‘Marlow’, asserts himself in the preface as the ‘author’ of the fiction that follows, before handing the narration to Robert Walton, who after a series of letters, passes the story-telling duties to Dr Frankenstein, who in turn hands it over to the nameless creature himself, from which it is progressively taken back by each. In contrast to contemporary equivalents, this meta-fictive technique doesn’t appear to have been constructed for the amusement of a critically observant knowing audience, but rather to bury the author altogether, who breathes through the characterisations of her narrators.

These literary strategies offer visual artists models for manoeuvrability in the circumvention of self-reflexivity. Artists seeking to represent themselves as characters within their practices could very easily adopt them to mark out a similar distance to their self-characterisation, inhibiting narcissism and diminishing the power of the artist’s controlling voice, to enable wider, freer response.

But there may yet be other ways of achieving the same outcome. In the concluding section presented next, I introduce a new artist/self-characterisation separation strategy for implementation in *dissociative play: persistent characterisation*, a semi-permanent state of characterised identity made possible by a willed shift in motivation that bleeds into and becomes the self, observed in the heavy metal music subgenre of *Black Metal*. Preliminary findings will then be developed into a more detailed discussion of *identity bleed* forms and practices in *dissociative play* in Chapter 3.

### 2.9 Alters of Satan

_In my darkest fantasy / I reach for Hell / and I am free*  

Music offers a distinct format for *dissociative play*, where performance, psychic and physical inhabitation provide an escape hatch from the creative constraints of singular, authentic self-representation. Heavy metal music, and in particular the extreme subgenre *Black Metal*, overflows with examples of artists who not only willingly channel - but actively embody - invented personae, and will be discussed in detail here, as an introduction to a new *dissociative play* strategy—*persistent characterisation*, one that is murkier in appearance, operation and definition, but as equally effective as any of the controlled processes discussed earlier in luring artists away from habitual limitation.

Persistent characterisation is especially apparent in Black Metal, an often maligned genre of heavy metal music typified by fast tempos, distorted guitars, shrieking and often indecipherable vocals, produced from within a satanic, pagan or anti-communal ideology. Employing a grim and grisly aesthetic that came to prominence in Norway in the early to mid-1990s as a result of the criminality of some musicians and fans, Black Metal musicians live, perform and record from inside the bodies and minds of invented inhuman characters.

Of particular relevance to *dissociative play* is the lack of separation between fantasy and reality states in the minds of Black Metal musicians, and in followers of the music also. What quickly becomes apparent with even a cursory look at this fascinating subgenre is that the wilful subjugation of pre-characterised self-identity that occurs in the construction and experience of

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the invented persona is - while open to speculation surrounding its authenticity and motivation - absolutely critical to making a valuable, original and perversely genuine contribution to the musical form.

The most striking characteristic of Black Metal is characterisation itself – namely, the employment of evil alter-egos by Black Metal musicians as a mediating force in the creative act. In music more so than any other form outside of the dramatic arts, the construction of pseudonymous personae is a key part of the methodology of production and performance, and is a popularly accepted tradition that extends far beyond heavy metal, in the characterised existences of musicians as diverse as Katy Perry (Katheryn Hudson), David Bowie/Ziggy Stardust, and Christine and the Queens (Héloïse Letissier).

But in Black Metal, the act of putting on a characterised mask, whether literal or metaphorical, is something that tends to permanently stick. The lure of what the mask offers outside of performance, in the generation of ideas and approaches, and in elevated subjectivity, is so strong that it has the potential, as we will see further in this section, to entirely envelop the non-characterised self. In this psychology, Black Metal musicians have free reign to play and live out transgressive fantasies that are at once satanic, pagan, intolerant, uncompromising, absolutist and intensely individualistic.

Black Metal’s adoption of pseudonymous alters is widespread, with almost every musician involved in the genre assuming an identity that provides a measurable distance from their mainstream peers, and grants ‘subcultural capital’ to operate outside of the everyday. The names chosen by Black Metal musicians signal an alliance with otherworldly, often occult forces, sourced widely from Norse legends, satanic mythology, Scandinavian folklore, and Tolkien’s ‘Lord of the Rings’. The act of renaming the self - a self-hypnotic strategy - stimulates a fracturing of identity, and is fundamental to dissociative play.

Intrinsic to the growth of the characterised identity in Black Metal music is the application of corpse paint (fig. 2.5). The distinctive painting of the face in black and white is one of the genre’s hallmarks, and most misinterpreted phenomena. Benjamin Olson describes the wearing of corpse paint as an attempt by bands ‘to become the physical manifestation of their music’.

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97 Benjamin Hedge Olson, "I Am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture" (Bowling Green State University, 2008), 25.
98 Documented in Peter Beste and Johan Kugelberg, True Norwegian Black Metal (London: Vice, 2008).
though the opposite may also be true—corpse paint is as symbolic of the musician’s desire to allow a persona to *drive* their musical form.\(^99\)

The idea that corpse paint represents the emergence of a previously hidden ‘inhuman’ persona, which materialises in order to assist with creative production, is supported by many in the scene, amongst them Jef Whitehead, also known as *Wrest* of the one-man-band *Leviathan*, who views its application as a signifier of creative emancipation: ‘it helps me remove the human factor... and it’s like the music is formed by itself.’\(^100\) Emperor Magus Caligula, former lead vocalist of Swedish Black Metal band *Dark Funeral*, interprets it somewhat differently, as the revelation of a dormant authentic self, one that is open to guidance by Satan, when he states, ‘You paint your inner face, that’s what we are all about. You just let Satan take over your fucking hand and draw your fucking face.’\(^101\)

Corpse paint is a signifier designed to express internal machination, symbolic of the transition of the musician from an ineffectual life mired in the mundane, to lively, embodied possession. It figures prominently in the live performance of Black Metal–a ritualised depiction of the act of transformation. Marked by the display of impaled animal heads, self-mutilation, and extravagantly spiked costume, these performances attempt to transition audience interpretation away from the stigma of association with adolescent fantasy play into something *credibly evil* (fig. 2.6).\(^102\)

The notion of a literal embodiment of ‘evil’ within the Black Metal musician is worth unpacking here, as it insinuates a subjugation of will to Satan - a denial of creative autonomy - and a strike against *dissociative play*. But in contrast to hysterical media reporting of the ‘satanic’ crimes and misdemeanours associated with the Norwegian Black Metal movement in the early 1990s, most musicians vehemently reject the notion of a satanic figurehead powering their production.\(^103\) Instead, appropriating the terminology of Nietzsche, many Black Metal musicians and theorists

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\(^99\) Olson, 47.


\(^103\) Crimes including murder, church burning, and grave desecration, documented in Moynihan and Söderlind.
regard ‘evil’ as simply a call to will and agency, an expression of radical individualism and a rejection of egalitarianism, or, as the late leader of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey, states, a ‘recognition of one’s own nature.’ Even amongst avowed Satanists in the Black Metal genre, such as Gorgoroth’s former lead singer Gaahl, the invocation of Satan is distinctly Nietzschean: ‘Satanism is freedom for the individual to grow and to become Superman.’

The methods employed by Black Metal musicians to enable this Nietzschean will to power through alter characterisation fall in three distinct categories: non-persistent, persistent positive and persistent negative. Each of these is worth unpacking as they not only demonstrate the range of expression possible in a persistent or possessive characterisation, but also its psychological demand—important considerations in the development of a sustainable dissociative play practice.

The non-persistent approach is observed in the repetition of controlled, willed movements in and out of character. Within this mode, the Black Metal musician is able to re-experience the leap in self-empowerment that comes from getting into character, returning renewed—a point that I will expand upon in the discussion of possession in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

Russell Menzies, better known as the persona Sin Nanna of the one-man Black Metal outfit Striborg, is an exemplar of this non-persistent approach. His motivation for returning from the grip of the persona is clear: ‘What I’m trying to do here is call the shots.’ His need for absolute creative control intersects with an equally pressing desire for elevated subjective experience (and possibly as a means of coping with worldly pressures), and to hit both of these markers requires separating his non-characterised, mild-mannered family self from Sin Nanna, the ‘entity’ that provides an outlet for his dark visions, and from whom his music flows (fig. 2.7, 2.8).

For some Black Metal musicians, the clear separation between fantasy and reality that typifies Menzies’ methodology is either very fragile or entirely non-existent. In the persistent positive model, the value that the persona adds to the life and art of the musician can lead to the characterised state becoming semi-permanent. In the case of Varg Vikernes, of prominent one-man Black Metal band Burzum, the benefit of a persistent persona is evident in the quality of musical works developed and released while in character.

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104 Wallin.
105 Olson, 68.
106 Anton LaVey, quoted in Moynihan and Søderlind, 261.
107 Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey, directed by Sam Dunn (Canada: Seville Pictures, 2006), DVD
Vikernes’ life is one of uninterrupted fantasy. Currently self-identifying as a chieftain in the Norwegian Heathen Front, he previously operated as Count Grishnack (fig.2.9), and it was from within this persona, torn from the pages of Tolkien, that Vikernes created a number of highly influential and original albums.\textsuperscript{110,111} The persistence of the characterisation was not entirely positive, however. In 1993 he was jailed for two decades following the murder of fellow musician Øystein Aarseth (aka Euronymous), a crime arguably committed while in character.

In statements made since dropping the characterisation (which coincided with his incarceration), Vikernes has downplayed much of the success of the material made under the moniker of the Count, perhaps spiteful of his persona’s role in leading him into so much trouble, revealing, ‘I don’t like the Count...he seems like a complete idiot. But I know it’s not me. It’s like a shadow of mine...’\textsuperscript{112,113}

The construction of a persistent persona, while potentially toxic, is crucial for the Black Metal musician’s creative output. With the identity in hand, a psychological space opens where social norms and artistic expectations seem irrelevant or easier to forget. The freedom and benefit that the persona affords the musician is regularly articulated by Black Metal musicians within their lyrics. A common lyrical trope in Black Metal is the phrase beginning “I am the...,” where musicians may describe their transformative embodiment as an aspect of nature (‘I am the wolf’; ‘I am winter when you freeze’), or a mythical figure (‘I am the black wizards’; ‘I am the war god’), celebrating the power of personification when the musician’s psychology is open to multiple, imagined identities.\textsuperscript{114,115,116,117}

When the persona is eventually abandoned, creative production shuts down altogether.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{110} Moynihan and Søderlind, 146.
\textsuperscript{112} Moynihan and Søderlind, 81-194.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{114} Darkthrone, Rex, from Goatlord, Peaceville Records, CDVILED337x, 2011, compact disc.
\textsuperscript{115} Satyricon, Immortality Passion, from Nemesis Divina, Modern Invasion Music, MIM7322-2CD, 1996, compact disc.
\textsuperscript{116} Emperor, I am the Black Wizards, from In the Nightside Eclipse, Modern Invasion Music, MIM7318-2CD, 1994, compact disc.
\textsuperscript{117} Deströyer 666, I am the War God, from Phoenix Rising, Season of Mist, SOM 032US, 2012 (reissue, recorded 2001), compact disc.
\textsuperscript{118} Numerous examples exist of Black Metal musicians dropping their pseudonymous personae, their corpse paint, and ritualised performance, and returning to their birth name, before dropping out of the scene altogether.
For some in the scene, the persistence of the persona is overwhelmingly negative, the weight of which fractures and disempowers, leading to despair and inactivity.

Scott Conner, whose persona Malefic is the creative force behind the ‘suicide black metal’ one-man band Xasthur, has spoken of the detrimental effects of a fractured consciousness dominated by his persona, in terms that bear comparison with dissociative identity disorder, and with an intensity that provides some caution for dissociative play:

Conner: “Sometimes I’ll step into my own future and past, and I’ll step through the eyes of someone else’s future and past... a lot of the time... “

Interviewer: “Are you ever afraid that you’re not going to get out of that space?”

Conner: “On the one hand I wonder if I really did make it out...maybe this is one of the people I’ve turned into...and this person now, is nobody...”

Psychological damage is possible when distinctions between performer and characterisation collapse, although the chances of it happening are remote. Although the troubled relationship between Conner and Malefic appears to suggest that it is probable, there is little evidence within the Black Metal scene to support any concern. Instead, the opposite is far more apparent, judging by the abundance of original musical material that has emerged over the past three decades from Black Metal musicians persistently in character.

At this point in the writing I’d like to shift gear and introduce the idea of bleed, a term I will expand further in the next chapter. Bleed is critical to dissociative play, and occurs when self and character comingle, when the segregation of states that compartmentalise consciousness breaks down. It is within this state of fracture that the subject might impact the alter, or the alter the subject, with one feeding upon or into the other.

Within the persistent characterisation model in Black Metal, bleed occurs in musicians when the persona’s semi-permanent occupation of the non-characterised self begins to impact the subjective life experience of the musician far beyond the character’s usual role in production and performance, as is evident in the persistent characterisations of Conner, Vikernes and Gaahl. Whether it does so with the willing participation of the self with the offer of heightened agency, or simply takes over by virtue of its greater capacity is unclear.

Within non-persistent characterisation, bleed is also possible but operates differently. Within this mode, bleed develops over time as the jumping back and forth between self and characterisation

119 “Everybody Dies Alone: One Man Metal (Part 3)”
reinforces the reality of the characterisation at the expense of the self. The subject in this mode is hijacked by the subjectivity of the *alter*, even claiming it as their own.

Whether persistent or non-persistent, featuring bleed or otherwise, the use of characterisation in Black Metal seems remarkably advantageous. Personae offer the musician an expanded agency and assist in the generation of novel outcomes. Self-reflexivity and habit are also reduced along the way, most evident in the non-persistent mode, as a consequence of the distance that musicians place between self and characterisation.

But persistent characterisation offers something more: it quenches an audience’s thirst for committed representation. Commitment to character is as important to Black Metal as it is to acting. Such is its importance to Black Metal audiences that they have their own name to describe its manifestation: *True Black Metal*. Only music generated from within a persistent characterisation is awarded that designation.

As the writing moves further into a discussion of bleed forms and practices, the differences in both the practice and reception of persistent and non-persistent modes of characterisation will become more apparent. But before we get much further into that discussion, an addition needs to be made at this point to the standing definition of *dissociative play*, to include persistent characterised practices that challenge the idea that the operation of *dissociative play* must be strictly temporary, short-term and under full conscious command. As is evident in the discussion of its appearance in Black Metal, movements outside the self within the frame of a characterisation that is largely persistent and self-consuming appear to allow for an expanded creative expression, a similar agential impact, and only a marginal risk of psychological harm compared to non-persistent varieties.

In order to fully comprehend the advantages and deficits of the persistence of *alter* characterisation in *dissociative play*, and the impact of bleed upon *alter* characterisation practice and reception, the research needs to shift sideways to look outside the contemporary arts, to ritual settings where movements between self and *alter* are actively encouraged. In these often murky disciplines, the act of moving in and then backing out of altered states of consciousness allows the subject to return to communicate the revelatory experience of the altered subjectivity of their *alters* to audiences, through a conflation of actual and imagined subjective experience. It is to these largely non-persistent *alters*, operating in fields as diverse as parapsychology and organised religion, to which the writing turns next.
Figure 2.1. Werner Herzog plays an unwitting version of himself in the meta-fictive mockumentary *Incident at Loch Ness*.

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Figure 2.2. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #10*, 1978, silver gelatin photograph, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, http://www.moma.org/collection/artists/5392
Figure 2.3. Sophie Calle and Paul Auster, *Double Game* (London: Violette, 1999), 14-15

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.
Figure 2.4. A selection of biographical dictionaries containing fictionalised entries of Patrick Pound.

Figure 2.5. Gaahl (R) in corpse paint.

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Figure 2.6. Gorgoroth live in Krakow, 2004

Peter Beste and Johan Kugelberg, *True Norwegian Black Metal* (London: Vice, 2008), 63-64
Figure 2.7. Russell Menzies


Figure 2.8. Russell Menzies as Sin Nanna

Figure 2.9. Varg Vikernes as Count Grishnack, promotional photograph, 1993

Moynihan and Søderlind, Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground, 156.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons
3. Altered States of Consciousness and the Bleeding Self in Dissociative Play

‘In reality you project your own energy out to form the physical world. Therefore, to change your world, it is yourself you must change. You must change what you project.’

In this chapter the writing turns to a discussion of aspects of dissociative play that inhabit the shadows and fringes of the mind, to fascinating and peculiar territories within altered states of consciousness. Though they defy easy definition and sometimes stretch credulity, these induced mental states offer dissociated subjects the chance to communicate from within unfamiliar subjectivities, stimulating novel thoughts and actions.

The effectiveness of these states is increased by what I term bleed. At the conclusion of the previous chapter I introduced bleed in the context of persistent characterisation, but here I will expand its context to include non-persistent, temporary dissociated practices, specifically within trance, spirit possession, out-of-body experiences and mask play, determining its function and operation within these forms, and assessing its role in dissociative play.

Bleed occurs when the compartmentalisation of dissociated and non-dissociated consciousness within a self/character, host/alter, subject/persona or medium/trance personality is not entirely maintained, allowing movement and influence between each. Breaks in conscious control mechanisms lead to the subject being unable to differentiate between dissociated and non-dissociated experiences, allowing one to spill into the other, permitting a reconciled subjective experience. Throughout this chapter I argue that this bleed between dissociated and non-dissociated consciousness is largely advantageous, and, despite appearances, doesn’t necessarily signal the presence of a dissociative disorder.

A note of caution at the outset, however, that this is not always the case. In instances of dissociation where the line between pathological condition and cultural practice is indistinct, bleed also appears.

I first encountered bleed in this context as a year 11 student in 1992. I’d became aware of the activities of a group of students, often the source of ridicule, who spent their lunch breaks in a

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small storage room below the school’s theatre immersed in role-playing activities, communicating in an invented language that sounded something like a marriage of Dutch and Latin. A key feature of their play was the apparent channelling of the spirit of an inanimate carved wooden dragon they called ‘Marshall,’ whose tail they would take turns holding in their teeth, and through which they would screech unintelligibly to kneeling members of the group. Finding this activity more interesting than anything else on offer during my lunch breaks, I’d occasionally spy on them through a small window set into the door, bemused by the satisfaction they experienced from the imaginative wielding of power and influence that belied their miserable position at the bottom of the school’s social ladder.

In August that year word started to spread that the youngest member of the group, a lanky blond haired boy named Matthew - already well known throughout the school for his uncontrollable outbursts in class - had ‘gone too far’. After telling members of the group that he and Marshall had become ‘one,’ Matthew set about trying to break through the concrete floor of the storage room with a crowbar he’d stolen from a nearby construction site, convinced of the existence of an underworld that lay beneath the theatre. To the astonishment of the group, his faith was quickly rewarded. He had managed to open up a hole in the floor that revealed a labyrinth of previously sealed tunnels that lay under the school’s foundations, which we later learned had been constructed during the second world war to store ammunition. He took Marshall down with him, convincing several members of the group to join him in an extension of their fantasy play.

After a day or two, their activities were discovered by the drama teacher. The Vice Principal called the entire group into his office and they were severely reprimanded.

But one of the students had refused to attend that meeting. Matthew, it seemed, had slipped irreversibly into fantasy and had refused to come out of the tunnel system. After an initial search by teachers he was unable to be located and the police were called in. They eventually found Matthew partially submerged in a drainage pit at the end of one of the tunnels, from which he was dragged out, clutching Marshall to his chest, shivering and screaming incoherently. We watched from an upstairs classroom as he was manhandled by four police officers into an ambulance. He never returned to school, and the tunnels were quickly sealed shut.

Matthew’s case is an exception to the general rule within cultures where the bleed between dissociated and non-dissociated subjectivities is more often individually and collectively beneficial. This is particularly evident in communal ritual practices and individual systems where supernatural entities communicate through the body of select individuals as part of a defined
system of belief, in what is known as spirit possession. While possessed, individuals willingly or involuntarily enter altered states of consciousness to communicate with, or channel the communication of, identities separate to the self, within a mature and supportive cultural framework.

The strong belief in the existence and influence of the dissociated identity is validated by the tangible memory of the dissociated experience, of an experience of selfhood so far removed from typical subjectivity, of the memory of a voice unlike the subject’s own, of a body that seems to move without conscious command, of a mind that felt, all experienced and expressed at a remove from imagined capacity. It is this belief, often developed within a culture that encourages it, that enables a bleed between actual and imagined subjectivity, each as felt as the other, in a dissociative practice that is entirely non-pathological and intensely impactful on subjectivity.

Before launching into a discussion of the play of consciousness, subjectivity and bleed in the dissociative phenomena that lie ahead, I’m going to pause with a caveat: while the dissociative phenomenon of spirit possession, for example, is the subject of ongoing peer-reviewed research in anthropology and psychology, the analysis of other dissociative phenomena to be discussed here is normally only undertaken in the domain of parapsychology. But in order to extract what is valuable for dissociative play, I make the assumption that each of these phenomena exist, at the very least in the minds of those experiencing them and within their audience structures, and each offer something of value to the research.

I begin the chapter with an analysis of self-induced hypnotic states, pairing culturally specific variants in trance to hypnotically induced states in psychology, considering their importance in preparing both body and mind to accept the temporary possession of a dissociated identity, the beginning of bleed, and an entry point for dissociative play.

From there the writing evolves to a discussion of possession phenomena, examining both voluntary and involuntary modes, analysing key differences in agency, communication and generative potential across cultures and belief systems, in the development of three key understandings: that all possessions involve bleed; that the forceful, temporary hold of possession on consciousness is valuable for individuals and cultures; and that possession can be induced in individuals experimenting with dissociative play through self-suggestion.

Following these findings, the research shifts to investigate involuntary physical movements observed in the automatic writing and drawing of hypnotised and possessed individuals, with an eye to their possible transference to dissociative play settings. The discussion of automatic
movement then leads to a consideration of the ideomotor response, a condition that operates somewhere near the edge of dissociation, in which concentrated mental activity appears to stimulate uncontrolled movements of body and form.

The chapter closes with a study of mask play in improvisational theatre, in an analysis of the effectiveness of dissociation as a practised technique specifically aimed at encouraging radical shifts in subjectivity and expected response.

3.1 An Ideal Bodymind

Within this section, findings from the study of the operation of culturally specific trance states in anthropology and self-induced hypnotic states in psychology, sometimes referred to as altered states of consciousness, are drawn together to propose an ideal bodymind for the insertion of a temporary non-pathological dissociated identity in dissociative play.

Hypnotic and trance states present a challenge to straightforward definition because of the uncertain nature of their experience, causing researchers to speculate upon their operation with often very little to go on: in most cases either the external observation of subjects entranced or hypnotised, or the unreliable accounts of those who have personally experienced the states.121

Some certainty in this area is needed in order to construct the ideal bodymind I have in mind, a self-induced and self-regulated hypnotised trance state primed for possession, but providing that certainty requires acknowledging that the different terms used in anthropology and psychology to describe trance and hypnosis essentially refer to the same process. This is easier said than done—only very recently, with the publication of Morton Klass’ Mind over Mind, have the gates of each discipline slightly opened, allowing dissociation to be discussed amongst anthropologists, and trance among psychologists, in an admission of operative similarity.122

What follows is an attempt to concisely and logically demarcate hypnosis, dissociation and trance as operative states across anthropology and psychology, providing a firm base from which an ideal bodymind might spring.

121 A similar difficulty is found in accounts of spirit possession, see Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives, ed. Bettina E Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson (London: Continuum International, 2010), 10.
Trance states are hypnotic states, and should not be confused for the phenomena with which they are regularly paired. Anthropologists regularly bury any analysis of the operative psychology of entranced individuals under the weight of associated cultural phenomena (such as shamanism, asceticism, meditation, spirit possession, revivalism and conversion, glossolalia or speaking in tongues, spiritualism, mediumship, channelling, near death experience, religious vision and hallucination). This avoidance strategy is partly an outcome of ethnographic training that favours the observation of visible behaviour, and partly a fear of contamination with other fields of enquiry, amongst them psychology. Psychologists, to their credit, do a better job of disentangling mental states and associated phenomena, and particularly so when they describe hypnotic states. If anthropologists were to do the same, trance would be revealed as a state that is unquestionably self-hypnotic in induction, suggestion and movement, distinct from associated visible phenomena, and different to hypnosis only by setting and field of enquiry.

Trance and self-hypnosis each involve a narrowing of attention and focussing out of reality. Though trance induction methods vary between cultures, each involves establishing a diversion from typical mental processes through intense concentration and a reduction in the perception of background activity, a mental process shared by hypnosis.

Trance and hypnotic states are dissociative. Trance must be dissociative in order to operate as a legitimate self-believed platform for the dissociated actions it is expected to carry out within a culture. The absence of a dissociated state of mind in trance would wholly limit any potential for the mind to legitimately inhabit, or be inhabited by, a non-self personality. The definitive proof, however, of dissociation’s involvement in trance comes from the overwhelming evidence of its role in hypnosis. If trance is a form of self-hypnosis, as I propose, then logic demands that the dissociations of hypnosis must also be the dissociations of trance.

Trance and hypnosis share an ideal bodymind, one that is highly suggestible and whose subjectivity is open to manipulation. Earlier in section 1.6, Embodied and Evasive Action, I defined the bodymind as a whole of body, whole of mind condition that combines perception and bodily response. In an entranced state, the bodymind is in an ideal position to experience entirely new subjectivities because it is able to dissociate both muscular and neural responses to stimuli, allowing the body and mind an expanded freedom of movement and expression, the memory of which impacts subjectivity.

124 Ibid., 19.
Within the trance state, the muscular-neural bodymind condenses actual and imagined experience into memories indistinguishable from reality. These memories become a bleed, trickling from the trance mind back into the conscious self, generating a post-trance state sensation of convincing reality.

The experience of trance is mediated by the culture in which the trance occurs, the specificity of which impacts hypnotic induction and suggestion. Culturally specific trance induction methods may include auditory driving, fasting, social isolation, sensory deprivation, meditation, hallucinogenic drug intake and extensive motor behaviour. Culturally specific suggestive devices deployed to assist the development and continuance of the trance state include the written, oral and experiential history of previous trance experience, the use of scripts, communal belief, symbology and setting.

Trance provides an empty human vessel capable of experiencing and communicating a dissociated identity from within a cultural context, and affords a similar freedom from limitation to that found in dissociative play. Both trance and dissociative play aim to empty the bodymind of habit, speculation and ambition in preparation for the arrival of an altered subjective experience.

A defining difference between trance and dissociative play, however, is the nature of the shaping mechanisms that allow the subject of each to enter the dissociated state. Within trance these are distinctly and specifically cultural, but in a dissociative play setting they are instead self-shaped, self-initiated, and self-regulated. Both systems are capable of action autonomous to the self, but dissociative play relies on the individual constructing the regulatory framework, not the culture.

The key requirement for trance, hypnosis and dissociative play is the willing and active involvement of participants, regardless of whether that state is self or externally regulated. Each demand a psychologically suggestible individual willing to be hypnotised, and each require that individual to manoeuvre to maintain the state of absorption. The willingness to regularly re-enter the state is also advantageous, as research into the neural plasticity of individuals frequently involved in the practice and maintenance of hypnotic states suggests that the ability to do so improves as the mind becomes ‘tuned’ to the experience, increasing the likelihood of it occurring at each attempt, the speed at which it is arrived at, and heightened suggestibility within the state itself.

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125 Ibid., 28.
126 Ibid., 25.
With trance in play, the dissociated, hypnotised mind is empty and suggestible— an ideal state of readiness for the insertion of a culturally-specific temporary non-pathological dissociated identity, and it is to this stage that the writing next progresses, in the discussion of possession phenomena.

3.2 Voluntary Possession

What is voluntary possession, how does it relate to bleed, and how might it be valuable in a dissociative play setting? To answer these questions the research remains – in effect - entranced, but shifts to examine cultural phenomena that emerge from this altered state of consciousness, traversing the experience and communication of possessed subjectivities.

In the previous section, the state of trance was depicted as an empty and suggestible dissociated mental state, an altered state of consciousness identical to the state of hypnosis, primed for the emergence of dissociative phenomena like possession. Despite contemporary assertions from anthropologists like Michael Lambek who insist that “trance is not prior to spirit possession in either a logical or causal sense,” I believe that trance is in fact a preparatory state, not just for spirit possession, but for a broad range of cultural phenomena that are sometimes mistaken for the state of trance itself. Here the discussion is limited to the phenomena most relevant to the research, and in particular one that inspires a free-flowing bleed between dissociated and conscious experience: voluntary possession.

Before we arrive at analysing its voluntary form, or charting its specificity, it is useful to define what is meant by possession. Possession is the subjective experience of one’s body, mind, or frequently both, having been taken over by another. I use the term possession throughout the writing to refer to the psychological condition of possession, and restrict the more specific spirit possession to its observed appearance in culture. But to both we could say, as Janice Boddy does, that the relationship between possessed subject and external entity is characterised by a ‘hold over a human being by external forces or entities more powerful than she.’

Within a spirit possession, the entities that Boddy refers to can be remarkably disparate: they may be entirely alien (supernatural or unidentifiable), identifiably cultural (in the form of divine beings,

128 For example, meditation and out of body experiences
for example), or represent the spirit of an ancestor. But her definition could be extended if we include the possibility of possession by a self-invented entity, as I contend is possible within dissociative play.

A dissociative play possession differs from anthropologic spirit possessions in ways other than its origin, however, if we look to the components that allow each to function: a spirit possession requires three— an individual willing or able to be possessed, a possessive entity, and a socio-cultural context in which the possession is enacted and interpreted, but a dissociative play possession needs only two— the individual and the entity.¹³⁰ The absence of any enveloping cultural or social context is an important distinction, for in dissociative play that absence provides an elevated individual agency and a wider freedom of movement.

All voluntary possessions allow for some measure of this experience through wilful participation. This willingness is a mechanism of control that regulates interactions between the self and the possession at a conscious or sub-conscious level, allowing the possessed individual partial governance over the range of movement within the condition and the ability to move in and back out when desired.

The maintenance of control is particularly important in the context of voluntary spirit possession, where it acts as a reassurance mechanism for both the individual and community of the practice’s viability. The individual’s experience of partial control in the possession encourages future attempts, which are necessary within a culture that utilises the possession to maintain a particular belief system, socio-political power structure, provides teaching, heals illness, resolves disputes, or passes judgement.¹³¹

The socio-cultural context of spirit possession regulates its potential. In the earlier discussion of trance the shaping mechanisms used by cultures, largely through suggestion, were discussed, and the same exist in possession phenomena. Suggestive devices similar to those employed to enable an individual to enter a trance state are employed within spirit possession (histories, scripts, symbology and setting) to control the expectation of not only what form the possessing entity might take, but also how it might operate, and what might materialise as a consequence.

The impact that these culturally-specific devices have on subjectivity and agency is weighty. Further, if we consider the dichotomies frequently used within spirit possession – controlled vs uncontrolled, voluntary vs involuntary, solicited vs unsolicited - and look beyond their ordinary role in demarcating cultural function and appearance to their operation in the mind of the possessed, we see that a possessed subjectivity is as much influenced by individual agency as it is by culture.\textsuperscript{132}

Shifts in agency and subjectivity become more obvious when the cultural context for the possession is removed altogether. This is perhaps most easily identifiable in pathological conditions of possession in cases of mental disturbance. But as the focus in dissociative play is on practice and wilfulness we need to look outside pathology, and beyond the current reach of anthropological enquiry, to find evidence of decontextualized or limited context possession practice.

A place in which this activity occurs frequently is parapsychology, in Spiritualism and New Age practices through the use of channelling (also known as mediumship). What makes this form of possession especially pertinent to the research is that it is carried out within a marginalised socio-cultural context, with a small audience or none at all, for individual agency rather than communal advantage.

The channel’s body is a communicative conduit in which self and possession are balanced for mutual benefit. The possessing entity (referred to in channelling circles as the ‘control’ because of the entity’s manipulation of the channel) is made material through the hijacking of the willing body of the self-hypnotised channel through which it communicates– the memory, recording and re-transmission of which is rewarding and individually transformative.\textsuperscript{133} Changes that occur in the body of the channel during the possession, such as altered vocal pitch, enhanced articulation and conceptual ability, atypical facial expression and postural transformation each re-inforce the existential reality of the entity, collapsing what might otherwise feel like an imagined experience into a new and enlivened subjectivity.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{132} The contribution of I.M. Lewis to the evaluation (and construction) of logical dichotomies within spirit possession is significant, where he argues against the value-heavy distinctions negative versus positive, authentic versus inauthentic, controlled versus uncontrolled in favour of the neutral and explanatory solicited and unsolicited, in, I. M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion : A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession (London: Routledge, 1989), 49.

\textsuperscript{133} Roberts, xii.

\textsuperscript{134} Jane Roberts describes the observed physical changes in her body and expression when channelling the entity Seth in ibid., 3. The transformative ‘step’ in subjectivity that comes from changes in individual
It is within the individual entranced bodymind of the channel, operating outside of a broadly supportive cultural context, where bleed between observed and imagined experience, and self and possessive entity, is intensified.

All possessions, regardless of their function or effect, involve bleed. They do so because of fluctuations in the self’s awareness of the possession state. The state of possession, like all non-pathological dissociative states, is not entirely captioned in the mind, and fractures in the separation of self and entity permit a bleed in both awareness and control over movement. The movement of the self inside the possession, where it monitors, regulates and looks for benefit, represents the bleed of the self into the possessed entity.

But in possession phenomena that exist outside of spirit possession’s culturally specific communal context the bleed can flow the other way, from the possession back into the self. This backflow is observed in channelling, where the presence and communicative wisdom of the inhabiting psychic entity is observed to positively and permanently affect subjectivity.

This impact seems to be made more likely by the entity’s proficiency in areas commonly considered difficult to navigate without external direction. In the personal accounts of channelling instructors Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer, the entity is depicted as a carrier of an extraordinarily wide-reaching psychotherapeutic acuity, healing relationship woes, improving health, expanding creative potential and intensifying dreams, among many other claims.

Regardless of the authenticity or otherwise of these unconditioned voluntary possessive entities, the perceived agential benefit that stems from communicating with them is clear, and exists only because of the bleed between actual and imagined experience.

So how might the understanding of bleed in marginal cultural phenomena like channelling impact dissociative play? And what of the reverse flow in culturally-bound possession phenomena? To understand the relevance of each to dissociative play requires returning to the concept of the ideal bodymind, partly constructed in section 3.1.

consciousness is described in “Summoning the Spirits: Possession and Invocation in Contemporary Religion,” 9.
135 See section 1.4 for earlier discussion in relation to hypnosis
136 Within spirit possession, the bleed of the self into the possession is most obvious in instances where possessed individuals use the possessive entity as a means to speak openly without fear of reprisal. Examples abound of the ‘use’ of possession as a kind of psychic shield that permits uncomfortable action within communities, for its use in admonishment see Klass, 51-53.
The ideal bodymind for dissociative play, already empty of conscious direction and highly suggestible, is one that encourages bleed to flow both ways, from host into alter, and alter into host, in a mutually possessive framework: a self-hypnotic state that is induced and managed through self-created and implanted versions of the external suggestive devices so critical to the success of socio-cultural possessions, so that bleed flows in a continuously alternating current, stimulating communication between both parties, disturbing individual consciousness by generating memories in the mind of one and permitting those to influence the actions of the other, creating novel thoughts, actions and material along the way.

Within this voluntary and mutually possessive framework of disfigured subjectivity, habit and limitation are effectively bypassed, a key target of dissociative play.

What is interesting to consider in the light of this idea is its capacity to be enacted in a bodymind where the possession is instead involuntary. What happens to subjectivity and agency in a bodymind when conscious control is limited? Could it still be a generative state? Might it offer something else for dissociative play?

3.3 Involuntary Possession

In this section, unsolicited, involuntary non-pathological states of possession are analysed to determine generative potential in dissociative play settings.

Launching this discussion requires overcoming an obvious incongruence. Involuntary states of possession don’t appear – at first glance at least – to share any commonality in induction, experience or agency with the wilful, called-for actions of dissociative play. In order to build a bridge between involuntary states and wilful processes I contend that the non-pathological instances of involuntary possessions within cultural practices (and their depiction in stories and films) are useful, generative phenomena that impinge far less on agency and free movement than commonly believed, and offer more to practice than what might be summarily assumed.

While individuals in the clutch of an involuntary possession typically lack control over the processes that govern its induction and experience, the involuntary condition is not necessarily disadvantageous. In fact, as we will see, it offers much the same as voluntary forms of possession in individual and communal benefit, and an equivalent generative potential.

If we confine ourselves to depictions of unsolicited possessions in literature and film, however, the scales tip decidedly the other way. When observed in the supernatural genre, involuntary
possession is almost always undesirable, uninvited and wholly uncontrollable, entering the host where it sees an opening and leaving chaos in its wake. In David Lynch’s TV series Twin Peaks, grieving father Leland Palmer is confronted by the realisation that a demonic force, known only as Bob (fig. 3.1), has dwelled inside his body since childhood, guiding him to rape and murder his own daughter.\(^\text{138}\) The possession accounted in the film The Exorcist (fig. 3.2) and countless others is similarly destructive.\(^\text{139}\)

But the reality of the experience of involuntary possession within cultures is decidedly different, favouring function and communal advantage over fracture and discord. Within these occurrences, the uncalled-for possession of the individual can be beneficial, potentially made more powerful through its lack of invitation, an indicator of its authenticity and larger reach through the genuinely empty vessel of the involuntarily possessed. Even in demonic possession the unsolicited occupying entity provides benefit—solidifying the plausibility of the culture’s belief system, providing caution, ridding the body of illness, or acting as a socio-political communicative apparatus.\(^\text{140}\)

It should also be noted that involuntary possessions may, through repeated experience, become solicited experiences, as is the case with the entity ‘Seth’ that Jane Roberts asserts entered her involuntarily, but to whom she willingly and regularly returns to channel on the basis of his benevolent teaching.\(^\text{141}\)

Seth, like so many uninvited possessions, becomes through repeated interaction a potent means for generating novel thoughts about the world. Even a single episode of involuntary possession of the magnitude experienced, for example, by the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus has the capacity to completely change future thought, feeling and action. Such is the power of the feeling of involuntary possession. But to experience it in the first place requires a suggestive mind.

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\(^{138}\) Twin Peaks, directed by David Lynch and Mark Frost (Australia: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2003), DVD.

\(^{139}\) The Exorcist, directed by William Friedkin (Burbank, California: Warner Home Video, 2000), DVD.

\(^{140}\) Lambek makes a convincing case for reinterpreting spirit possession as a socio-political communicative apparatus in, Lambek.

\(^{141}\) Roberts claims she ‘wasn’t drifting, or looking for a purpose’ when one evening ‘Seth’ entered her body ‘with a huge ripping sound’ like a tear in the fabric of the physical world, prompting her to maniacally annotate the alien thoughts and ideas that had so suddenly entered her mind. Over following days she moved to using a Ouija board to spell out his name and establish his purpose, before eventually moving to ‘voice’ him in subsequent wilfully motivated encounters, in Roberts, 10-106. Further evidence of shifts in involuntary to voluntary modes can be seen in the study of possession phenomena in Afro-Brazilian religions, see Romara Delmonte et al., "Can the Dsm-5 Differentiate between Nonpathological Possession and Dissociative Identity Disorder? A Case Study from an Afro-Brazilian Religion," Journal of Trauma & Dissociation 17, no. 3 (2016).
An involuntary possession requires the individual to be able to enter a state of trance in order for a dissociation of actual and perceived experience to take place in exactly the same measure as an invited possession. And it requires a culture to contextually situate the entity for functionality. The possession must be identifiable in order to fulfil its function, regardless of whether the entity is an ancestral spirit, divine being, or extra-terrestrial force. The absence of any specific cultural function, or individual or communal benefit, points to the involuntary possession being of pathological origin, or the result of an externally induced hypnosis.\textsuperscript{142}

We return now to the conundrum of incongruity posed earlier – surely by definition an involuntary possession couldn’t be experienced within a dissociative play setting? By definition, yes, but if we broaden the requirement within dissociative play for a willing \textit{bodymind}, to one that is simply ready, the possibility for an involuntary possession remains open.

It is made even more so if we look to the similarities that voluntary and involuntary possessions share in appearance and function. Both offer benefit to their cultures and communities, both generate novel thoughts, feelings and actions, and both are as likely to be temporary as the other.

But are they distinct in agency, control and movement?

In the earlier discussion of double consciousness in the dramatic arts, conscious control and agency were found hand-in-hand, in a voluntary willed dissociative practice where the actor, in a position between self and character, engaged conscious control mechanisms to avoid the possibility of bleed, of reality and characterisation falling into one another, of the actor’s emotions impacting those of the performed identity, and conversely, of performed emotions seeping into the everyday life of the actor.\textsuperscript{143} Within the voluntary willed dissociative phenomena of possession, however, the strict maintenance of control actually inhibits the function of the possession, and negatively impacts agency.\textsuperscript{144}

Possessions, as noted previously, need to bleed in order to function within cultures. While voluntary forms still permit a degree of conscious or semi-conscious control in induction and movement, involuntary modes do not. And while solicited and unsolicited possession phenomena require a similarly suggestible mind in order to materialise, the largely uncontrolled movement of unsolicited forms - specifically the lack of control in the induction and termination of the possession state - dramatically reduces agency.

\textsuperscript{142} The experience of possession has been successfully induced involuntarily in hypnotically suggestable subjects in experimental settings, see Deeley et al.
\textsuperscript{144} With some exceptions, for example in the practice of shamanism
From this the following can be stated with certainty: that the maintenance of conscious control, while a critical factor in preserving individual agency, is less impactful on what is possible, functional and largely beneficial in a non-pathological possession, whether solicited or otherwise. This understanding has obvious implications for dissociative play.

At this point we should consider whether conscious control might even be disadvantageous in certain dissociative practices, processes and phenomena, particularly as they relate to the generation of novel thoughts, feelings and actions. Might the absence of conscious control in dissociative play permit further movement away from the self? In order to evaluate this proposition, we move next to examining its absence in automatic and involuntary processes, practices and phenomena.

3.4 Automatic and involuntary processes, practices and phenomena

Here I assert that automatic and involuntary movements that operate in the absence of conscious awareness impact subjectivity by provoking the feeling that they have been stimulated from a place beyond the self, and as such are ideally situated for experimentation within a dissociative play practice.

The processes and phenomena to be discussed here vary in appearance and cultural context, but share an equal ability to bypass conscious thought and allow muscular movement to be manipulated unconsciously, allowing the body to produce seemingly ‘alien’ movement. These include, but are not limited to, the processes and phenomena of automatic writing, dowsing, table turning, magic pendulum and Ouija board communication, each of which project the unconscious to the fore in determining movement that feels as if it has been initiated by an external force.

The scientific study of involuntary movement began in the 1850s with research by William Benjamin Carpenter, and later James Braid, into what Carpenter called the ‘ideomotor’ response, the stimulation of muscular movement apparently independent of conscious desire or emotion. Curiously, Carpenter’s interest in the possibility came from a cultural context – Spiritualism – a popular belief system in the mid-late nineteenth century that fostered communication with, and

guidance from, disembodied members of the spirit world. Spiritualists claimed (and still claim) to be able to connect with spirits through a variety of means and apparatus, the best known being the contemporary Ouija (fig. 3.3), or talking board, through which a ‘spirit’ takes control of the movement of the hands of a group holding a pointer, or planchette to spell out a message, one letter or number at a time. Spiritualism’s employ of automata is not limited to Ouija, however, as prior to its introduction the phenomenon of ‘table turning’ was equally popular. Here, groups would gather around a table that suddenly appeared to move, rattle or knock of its own volition under the apparent guidance of called-for spirits (fig. 3.4).

Carpenter examined automatic phenomena such as these in the context of expectant attention and self-suggestion, and determined that the phenomena could be entirely attributed to the unconscious expectation in the mind of participants that the effect should happen, triggering barely perceptible, consciously unaware bodily movements that made that expectation a self-fulfilling reality. These movements, Carpenter concluded, were responsible for the tilting or rapping of tables in Spiritualist practices by a participant or multiple participants without any conscious awareness; and the communication of the Ouija by communal expression of the same.

In the single-participant modes of dowsing (the use of a divining rod or pair of twigs to locate water or precious metals, fig. 3.5) and magic pendulum (a hand-held swinging weight that appears to move under its own volition, fig. 3.6), the ideomotor effect was again attributed by nineteenth century scientific enquiry to be the single determining factor in each device’s apparently supernatural movement. Yet even with this knowledge in hand, participants continued to believe otherwise, going so far as to assert that their own awareness and acknowledgment of the scientific validity of ideomotor ‘immunised’ them from its potential effect, reinforcing the belief in the existence of alien - rather than unconscious - control.

Participants make these extraordinary justificatory leaps in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence because the practice is beneficial for them. The temporarily displacement of conscious control by an external controlling influence enables the sensation of novel, alien feelings that expands the participant’s self/world relationship— their very subjectivity.

146 The growing cultural influence of Spiritualism also contributed to the re-emergence of interest in trance and hypnosis, dormant for almost a century since the pioneering work of Franz Mesmer.
148 Carpenter.
149 Hyman.
150 Ibid., 424.
The continuance of the participant’s belief in the reality of the external control is essential if that movement in subjectivity is to be repeatedly experienced, as the belief maintains the unconscious self-suggestive impulses that in reality drive the experience. As Michel Eugene Chevreul noted in observations of his own experiments with the magic pendulum in the early 1800s, ‘So long as I believed the movement possible, it took place; but after discovering the cause I could not reproduce it’.  

The same is true of the alter in dissociative play, whose existence, let alone functionality and independent movement, relies on the host maintaining a self-deceptive belief in its reality, which it achieves through self-suggestive textual and imagery implantation.

Unconscious suggestion is critical to the maintenance of self-deception, dissociative play and hypnotic states. It provokes movement that appears to come from outside the self, validating the reality of the state. These movements, as is clear from this discussion, are possible with or without trance— all they require is a dissociative intervention.

What is also clear in automatic and involuntary phenomena is the benefit of a suggestive context. Within the cultural contexts discussed in this section, the anticipation in the participant of a particular result is stimulated not only by a pre-conceived unconscious bias, but also by the environment in which the activity takes place. If we look to automatic phenomena inspired by the apparently arcane and tactile presence of the Ouija board, for example, we see a considerable suggestive force, not only in the perceived historic workability of the object itself, but in the context in which it must be used in order to function: a communal operation within a quiet darkened room.  

But the suggestive context does not necessarily need to be externally planted in order to function— it just needs to be believable. In a dissociative play context devoid of externally planted suggestion, the suggestive context is in fact well within the reach of individual construction and implantation through self-made scripts written both in and out of character, and imagery used in visualisation and recall (see section 1.7).

I’d like to return to the question posed at the close of the previous section regarding conscious control, where I asked, with a little uncertainty, whether its continued presence in dissociative play might in fact be disadvantageous in promoting movement away from the self.

152 The Ouija, despite its arcane appearance, and similarity to nineteenth century ‘talking boards’ is a twentieth century phenomenon, marketed and distributed by toy maker Hasbro Inc.
From what has been observed here, the case for continuous conscious control in *dissociative play* appears fragile. From what we have seen, suggestion seems to have a greater influence in its absence, particularly in the experience of novel movements that appear to come from outside of the self.

In fact there is evidence that explicitly links the *absence* of conscious control to *increases* in the experience of novel involuntary movement in recent studies of automatic writing phenomena and ‘alien-hand’ syndrome in hypnotised subjects. In these studies, hypnotically suggestible participants are directed to voluntarily relinquish conscious control to an ‘alien operator’, after which they are directed to write by external suggestion. The results reveal that even without external suggestion, the hypnotic state alone provides an adequate stage for the sensation of involuntary external control over muscular movement to cause some participants to write in a graphical style judged to be unfamiliar as their own. With external suggestion, the style as well as the content of the writing increases in unfamiliarity, and with an increase in external suggestion, the less familiar and more ‘alien’ the output appears.

Experimental attempts to induce alien-control phenomena are principally geared towards distinguishing operational differences between pathological instances and cultural phenomena, and while acknowledging key differences in agency, the dramatic effect of the feeling of one’s subjectivity being manipulated beyond conscious control is common to both pathology and practice, and is surprisingly easy to induce.

While argument continues across competing studies as to the extent of simulation by non-pathological participants pretending to dissociate consciousness and muscular movement in alien-hand phenomena to fulfil the requirements of the suggestion (whether in hypnotic experiment or cultural practice), what is clear is that regardless of the possibility of simulation, the expectation to fulfil the requirement of the suggestion is exactly the same, and as such has an equal effect on movement, the post-realisation of which can’t help but impact subjectivity.

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153 Walsh et al.
154 Ibid., 32.
155 This is an argument that is a subsidiary of an unending and unnecessary debate in hypnosis research that pits those that believe the hypnotic state to be a consciously unaware altered state of consciousness (State Theory) against those who contend that it is not a special state at all, open to simulation through consciously aware role-playing (Non-State Theory), when evidence suggests that both are possible, and all that really matters is which works better to meet the demand of the suggestion. For different views of the potential of simulation to skew research data in dissociative phenomena see ibid., 31. versus Merckelbach, Devilly, and Rassin.
That impact is made possible largely because of the novel movement of the body, dissociated from conscious awareness by the transmission of signals from the unconscious to the central nervous system, which validates the currency of the experience of phenomena that appears to originate from somewhere outside conscious control, impacting sensation and memory, and shifting, if not rupturing altogether, a fixed, singular subjectivity.

So, how might the findings in each of the previous sections inform the practice of dissociative play? In closing this chapter on the impact of bleed, possession and automatic phenomena on subjectivity I’d like to turn to an example of where that impact is evident in practice, to demonstrate that these phenomena do not necessarily need a scientific, ritual or parapsychological setting in which to flourish. To do this, I’d like to get into the minds of performers engaged in improvisational mask-play.

3.5 Mask Play in Improvisation

In the previous two sections, the influence of suggestion on consciously-unaware involuntary movement and its subsequent impact on subjectivity was charted in dissociative phenomena specific to experimental psychology, ritual culture and practices aligned to parapsychology. Here I’d like to shed some light on how this process works in an improvisational setting that is specifically aimed at encouraging radical, albeit temporary, shifts in subjectivity and expected response.

In improvisational theatre, the experience of the performer is geared towards developing a heightened perceptual acuity to enable fast and fluid response to live action, in contrast to theatrical conventions that emphasise slowly built internalised characterisation and measured response. Intuitive, rather than learnt response is encouraged within improvisation, which performers initiate through an outward projection of focus.

In improvisational theatre conscious monitoring is actively discouraged. Instead, the performer relies on the unconscious to determine response in the moment, in stark contrast to the conscious control mechanisms that define Chekhov’s technique of divided consciousness.

The techniques at hand to assist the performer to enact the required mental gymnastics of this activity vary in scope, and most are limited, not unreasonably, to helping the performer during

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the act of improvisation itself. But if we assume that the improvising act requires an altered state of consciousness in order to be made possible, and that the altered state impacts attention, memory and function during its operation, by logic the techniques best placed to enact the state and successfully guide the performer through performance must take place prior to the state being enacted and the event taking place, in a self-suggestive priming phase.

It is here where the ‘mask play’ technique developed by Keith Johnstone works its way in, a key component of his seminal manual *Impro*, and the most relevant to the discussion here. Mask play is designed to negate the natural anxiety of actors entering performance situations over which they have little control (and which they shouldn’t be able to control) through the use of an often grotesque mask (fig. 3.7). The mask acts as a forceful suggestive device, changing the appearance of the body to protect the performer from self-conscious reflection (aiding in the dampening of internal dialogues that are the bane of improvisation), and forcing a temporary injunction in the performer’s typical self-world relationship— their subjectivity.

Johnstone was not the first to discover the ability of the mask to project characterisation away from the self away during performance, but he was one of the first to contextualise it as a training practice for improvisation.

Masks work as a kind of self-permission apparatus for the performer to be something or someone other than themselves, much like the corpse paint of Black Metal. To activate that permission, Johnstone uses a variety of suggestive techniques with groups of performers, first raising his dominant status amongst them by adjusting his posture and laying out the rules of engagement, asserting control over when and how the mask is to be used, before reassuring performers that they “will not be held responsible for their actions while in the Mask.” The technique continues with what he calls ‘charging,’ where the performer puts on the mask, is asked to clear their mind, before confronting their reflection in a mirror. The gap between the performer’s expectation and the reality of their appearance is wide enough to shock them into dissociating their sense of

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157 Including, but not limited to ‘outward listening’ and ‘active listening’, see ibid., 96.
159 Johnstone built on earlier work with mask play training developed by Jacques Copeau in the 1920s and later Michael Saint-Denis, who in turn taught George Devine, who then introduced the practice to the Royal Court Theatre in the 1950s. Johnstone led Devine’s classes. In, Drinko, 83.
160 Johnstone, 165.
161 Drinko, 84.
self from their appearance, prompting a range of uninhibited expressions that often surprise the performers themselves.  

The similarity of Jonhstone’s induction techniques to the suggestion, relaxation and narrowing of focus demanded of hypnosis and trance is no coincidence. Further, his belief in the masked performer’s capacity to become possessed by the mask’s character (whatever the performer believes that character to be) shares much in common with ritual possession practice, and, by association, with dissociative play.

The mask’s capability to negate conscious control of movement and expression exists independent of the innate ability of the performer, and also, importantly, of their predilection, and it is this ability that is of the greatest value to dissociative play. Additionally, the functionality of mask play outside a defined cultural context (mask play doesn’t necessarily need to have theatrical outcomes), the adaptability of the external suggestion of mask play teaching to a self-suggestive model (all that it requires, after all, is a belief in the performer that it works), and its ease of use equally contribute to the practice’s potential for implementation in a dissociative play setting, whether by conception, method or material.

Each of the processes, practices and phenomena discussed throughout this chapter offer something of the same potential to dissociative play. The problem lies in which to advocate—after all, how can we in the midst of so many modes that each offer something to the research, whether by voluntary, involuntary, controlled, uncontrolled, conscious, temporary, persistent, partially aware or consciously unaware direction, determine what might work well and what might be less useful within a visual art setting?

The only way to do so is to look at the qualities of material generated by practice, and it is to this end that the writing next attends.

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162 Ibid., 85-88.
Figure 3.1. Leland Palmer and Bob reflected in a mirror, in a still from *Twin Peaks*, episode 14.

*Twin Peaks*, directed by David Lynch and Mark Frost (Australia: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2003), DVD.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.
Figure 3.2. Linda Blair as the demonically possessed Regan MacNeil, in a still from *The Exorcist*.

*The Exorcist*, directed by William Friedkin (Burbank, California: Warner Home Video, 2000), DVD.
Figure 3.3. Ouija and Planchette in operation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPFK4ezZz1A, accessed 24 July 2017
Figure 3.4. Table-turning in 19th century France

Figure 3.5. Dowsing: use of a divining rod observed in Britain in the late 18th century

Thomas Pennant, watercolour, 1781, National Library of Wales,

Figure 3.6. The *Magic Pendulum* in motion

Figure 3.7. Ingrid Von Darl and Dennis Cahill engaged in mask play

4. The Material Aftermath of Dissociative Play

From here the focus of the research shifts from a conception of the operative psychology of dissociative play to evidence of its generative capacity within the visual arts.

In the previous three chapters, I began by considering the place of the subject in relation to dissociative pathologies and processes, before switching to an analysis of the place of the author/creator in relation to the dissociated self within narrative structures, and closed the most recent chapter with a consideration of the role of bleed in the dissociations of trance, possession and automatic phenomena.

In this chapter, the wide reach of the tentacles of dissociation are traced within the visual arts, to determine their existing impact on practice and conceptualise future range.

While each of the dissociative practice and phenomena modes discussed previously – whether voluntary or involuntary, controlled or uncontrolled, temporary or persistent, consciously aware, partially aware or consciously unaware – influence subjectivity, the question of their capacity to do so within a visual art setting can only be measured by their effect on material generated by their application.

To begin the discussion of their effect, I look at existing practices within the visual arts where dissociation occurs not so much in the mind of the artist, but as an outcome of process, where a deliberate separation of the self from the crafting of objects enables a dissociation of function.

I discuss the phenomena of characterisation, where performance is used by visual artists to dissociate themselves from the processes that enable object creation. While the use of characterisation as a strategy to enable object generation seems like a specifically contemporary concern, its lineage can be traced to performance practices of the 1960s and 70s, back further to the pseudonymous play of Marcel Duchamp, and further still to the seventeenth century function-free play of Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts.

Within these characterised practices, props and documentation are used as self-suggestive tools to sustain the reality of the characterisation for the artist, which are dissociated post-event by processes of reconfiguration and de-contextualisation to bury, remove, or at least muddy, the self
in the process. These practices are effectively artist/object dissociations, and through that dissociative process emerges the possibility of a freedom for the object outside of its intended function and fixed relationship to its maker.

But these practices, while dissociative in outcome, are ineffectual at impacting an artist’s subjectivity, which fails to be moved by the inability of the characterisation to bleed into the everyday. They are as hamstrung as the deception and revelation complexes of Iris Häussler, trapped in a closed circuit where any influence of the characterisation on the artist’s subjectivity is made almost impossible by a lack of belief in the character’s reality, in practices that are more performance than feeling.

So how might bleed be encouraged in a visual art practice that uses dissociative play? How might a dissociated characterisation be made flesh and blood? How might it be felt in performance? Is it really possible to produce work genuinely in character? And, assuming that it is possible, how do objects generated through this process impact an artist’s subjectivity?

In the second section of this chapter, I attempt to provide answers to each of these questions through an analysis of the hypnotic relationship between myself and alter Tor Rasmussen, an entity also known as Kraken, more corporeal than any imagined character. The experience of temporarily passing my bodymind into his clutches has been enormously rewarding, stimulating novel thoughts and feelings, creating a trail of documentation and spawning unlikely bodies of work, made in his bodymind during his control, and in my own after he has left, impacting subjectivity by altering the perception of what is possible within a singular artistic practice.

4.1 Characterisation: Dissociation, Distance and Autonomy

Earlier in section 2.7, ‘The Artist as Character,’ I charted the increasing use of self-characterisation by artists like Sophie Calle and Patrick Pound in processes designed to implant the self as a fictive yet active agent in self-made narrative structures. In these processes, a dissociation of the artist as artist and the artist as character (who happens to share the same name) confuses self-motivation and audience expectation, permitting a degree of free movement. Here, I’d like to expand upon that idea by introducing the possibility of including within that characterised process the potential for a wider distance between artist and character, one that promotes dissociation between objects that emerge from the process of performing the characterisation and the hand of the maker.
The two classes of object to be addressed here, prop and documentation, have a distinctly dissociative role in characterised performance within the visual arts, geared toward eventually removing the object from its performative foundation and setting it free from function and its association with its creator.

The discussion begins with analysis of the prop in characterisation, with a re-conceptualisation of Marcel Duchamp’s prop *Fountain* (fig. 4.1), a now destroyed but widely replicated urinal signed by the artist’s pseudonymous characterisation ‘R. Mutt’.¹⁶³

Duchamp submitted *Fountain* under pseudonym to covertly test the limits of the Society of Independent Artists selection committee’s purportedly open charter for the *Independents* exhibition of 1917.¹⁶⁴ The signature R. Mutt is the work’s only distinguishing feature, the only sign that it is not - apart from its original un-plumbed, side-mounted installation - a purely functional component of a public bathroom.

Historically, most discussion of *Fountain* focuses on its significance as a Duchampian *readymade*, and is burdened by cyclical, possessive debates regarding operation and intent. An ever-growing list of assertions veers from a consideration of the *readymade* as part of a ‘naming’ phenomena that elevates declaration as a primary concern in an artist’s decision-making process, to psychosexual readings, to interpretations informed by aesthetic theory: of Kantian notions of disinterested pleasure, and Duchamp’s own assertion of visual indifference.¹⁶⁵,¹⁶⁶,¹⁶⁷ It’s a heavy load for a disconcertingly simple form to carry, made more difficult by Duchamp, who took delight in persistently obscuring his intent with contradictory remarks.¹⁶⁸

The aim here is to sidestep these debates and approach *Fountain* from a different angle, initially through a discussion of Duchamp’s use of pseudonym, a dissociative practice, and its impact on authorship and objecthood.

Duchamp’s pseudonymous authorship of *Fountain* is not a theatrical embellishment, but evidence of a premeditated plan to enable distance. The pseudonym operates as an intermediary,

¹⁶⁶ Seigel, 137.
removing responsibility, bypassing ego, and obscuring intention and definition – each contributing to a growing dissociation between subject and object.

The pseudonymous signature of R.Mutt on Fountain was never intended to deceive, only to test or play. In fact the use of the pseudonym by Duchamp is decidedly different to the function of pseudonym in outright hoaxes and art fictions, to which Fountain is sometimes incorrectly attributed, as the operation of pseudonym in fictional productions like Iris Häussler’s He Named Her Amber attests. In her work, the function of pseudonym is strictly limited to the purpose of maintaining deception, and objects made within that frame become null and void at the moment of the work’s revelation as fiction. Fountain, however, continues to operate autonomously as an object quite separate to its supposed ‘fiction.’ It is able to do so because of the object’s distance from its maker – from the very moment of its creation (as a piece of plumbing), to its authorship (pseudonymous), its extrication from any distinguishable function, exploiting the uncertainty that surrounds the distinction of art objects from other made forms.

Fountain dissociates function through distance and indeterminate operation, and while that dissociation is different to the dissociative operation of the alter in dissociative play, the movement away from static subjective modes to a fluid position that permits the release of generated material to a place at a remove from the habitual, limited self is remarkably similar.

Part of Fountain’s ability to do this comes from elsewhere, outside Duchamp’s legacy of indeterminism. It resides within the object itself, through its history of selection, alteration and display, subsequent replication and formal re-evaluation, each of which further dissociate the object from its original staging.

I’ll address the last of these first. Purely formal interpretations of Fountain emerged shortly after its exhibition, from Walter Arensberg, “a lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose” and Louise Norton who admired its “chaste simplicity of line and colour,” before falling silent until a re-emergence in the aesthetic critique of Steven Goldsmith.\footnote{Beatrice Wood, I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988), 229-30., quoted in Seigel, 139.} Goldsmith argued that a formal reading of the work was entirely legitimate and appropriate, as the work revealed a revolutionary egalitarian, anti-conceptual and anti-aesthetic potential, a dissociated autonomy entirely independent of its apparent hoax origin.\footnote{Louise Norton, “Buddha of the Bathroom,” The Blind Man 1917.}
These accounts extricate *Fountain* from its historical context with a similar force to that exerted by Duchamp in the removal of the object from its function, and when these forces are paired to the ongoing appearance of duplicates of the original in museums, and the seemingly endless dissemination of *Fountain* in imagery and advertising, what occurs is a gradual dilution of the importance of the context in which the work was originally situated, enabling *Fountain* to move beyond its origin as a ‘hoax’ prop to a place of autonomy.

It is not surprising that artistic interventions that make use of pseudonym or absent authorship often seem like art hoaxes or fictions, as their historic use in deception is well documented. But even in instances of hoax, where the pseudonymous or absent author requires a props to support the deception, the prop still carries the ability, whether granted through the passing of time or confusion about intention, to become dissociated from its origins and live on as something else.

Consider Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts’ *Trompe l’oeil. The Reverse of a Framed Painting*, 1670 (fig. 4.2). ¹⁷² The paucity of historical documentation surrounding this peculiar *trompe l’oeil* has led most commentators to assume it was made as a practical joke for auction, which they justify by the salesroom number note painted in the upper left corner. It has, historically, been written off as a droll deception, but if we take a closer look at the painting something else emerges, a dissociated function that runs perilously close to crashing into Norbert Schneider’s warning of misinterpreting Gijsbrechts’ work as abstraction. ¹⁷³

The first clue that may lead to a different reading of the work is something that is not there at all – a style. Paired to the lack of any attributable style is the absence of genre markers prevalent in 17th Century Dutch still life, and if we add to that the absence of any identifying mark of the maker, the painting begins to look decidedly empty. Even the often repeated assumption of the painting’s function as a hoax to trap the unwary at auction seems dubious, given the lack of any evidence of it having ever been seen in that context. ¹⁷⁴ Assumptions like these emerge as a result of the uncertainty that an alternative interpretation might supply, that it was, perhaps, created *without* purpose.


¹⁷⁴ Ibid.
Paintings, like any other art object, are usually expected to do something, and the dissociation of their function from the life of their maker, whether by intention or accident, is a point at which dissociative play aims.

For this purpose dissociative play requires a prop. In the following section, I will explain the prop’s purpose as an hypnotic device, but in the context here I’ll limit discussion to the prop’s appearance as a transitional, malleable form in existing practices.

A prop seems an unlikely candidate object for an artist to dissociate. After all, its very attribution relies on fulfilling a specific function in performance and little else. In theatrical settings, the prop’s purpose is largely symbolic, providing support within a setting to the development of narrative, in an existence that does not outlive the end of the show. But in the visual arts, where performance is increasingly used as an intermediate stage to get somewhere else, the prop is often generated through performance as much as it is developed for it, and after performance has the chance to experience an extended, divergent, and autonomous existence.

The performances of visual artist Guy Benfield are geared towards prop-making. In performances that accompany or generate installations, Benfield sets himself a series of tasks to create new props using existing paintings, drawings and pottery props, taking on the role of a character, sometimes with wigs and glasses, partly informed by his own persona, and that of his father and former lecturers. He speaks of his works in terms of autonomy, of liberating form through performance.\footnote{Art Talk, “Guy Benfield: Maximum Commune” (video), July 22, 2007, accessed March 21, 2017, http://arttalk.podomatic.com/entry/2007-07-22T21_23_23-07_00.}

Not coincidentally, Benfield is also an advocate of reconfiguring his identity to create “distance” between himself as the maker, and the objects he wills into being at a remove from himself.\footnote{Ibid.} In French Pup (fig. 4.3), disguised by long hair and sunglasses, he lampoons romantic artistic mythologies, splattering the walls of the gallery with paint.\footnote{Guy Benfield, French Pup / Live Action, 2001, live performance, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.} The material remnants of these performances don’t exist merely as evidence that the events occurred as they are far more useful—regenerating in future performances and installations, providing material and conceptual fodder for Benfield’s object-based practice.

The life of the prop is protracted in Marcin Wojcik’s practice, where it can be found at the beginning, middle and end. As a precursor to his installations, Wojcik submits to a documented
training schedule where he makes use of invented props that assist with a particular sport or past-time. These props have included a hand-built boat, glider, cycling and climbing paraphernalia (fig. 4.4). These are characterised role plays, where he physically inhabits a persona, acting out an imagined response to his character’s interaction with equipment and adversity.178 His character’s props are highly aestheticized, and somewhat impractical, but they seem to work nonetheless for the purposes for which Wojcik’s character demands.

Wojcik’s training characterisations are not employed for performance, but for the purpose of his formal object-based practice. After the training period ends the props begin another journey, back into Wojcik’s studio where they are disassembled and re-modelled into radically decontextualized fetish-like forms that are eventually brought together in installation (fig. 4.5), their function negated by cutting, joining, assemblage, recolouring and repurposing.

Props used in characterised practices - once dissociated from function - operate in a similar manner to performance documentation, which become separated from function by deliberate action and the passage of time.

The video and photographic documentation of performance art since the 1960s shares a similar de-contextualised presence to the dissociated props of Wojcik and Benfield. As archival forms in museums, these remnants are for many viewers and scholars stand-ins for performance itself. Performance practices since the 1960s, whether intended for a live audience or otherwise, see a reliance on documentation to extend the life of the performance. Documentation produced can be legitimately documentary – where a live performance with a live audience is documented to enable a larger audience for the work post-performance (an example is Chris Burden’s Shoot, 1971, fig. 4.6), or theatrical – in which the appearance of an event is constructed without a live audience present (as is the case with Yves Klein’s Leap into the Void, 1960, fig. 4.7).179,180 In either case the performance documentation shares a similarity in overt staging for the explicit purpose of documentation.181

Decades after these performance events themselves have taken place and with reconstructions and re-performances of critically important works carried out regularly on the international stage,

a reconsideration of the current function of performance documentation in the context of
dissociated function is valuable.

In *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*, Philip Auslander makes a convincing
argument for the legitimacy of a contemporary reading of performance documentation as a form
of performance itself for which the viewer, at a temporal remove from the original action, is now
its audience. But apart from stimulating an imaginative response in the contemporary
audience/viewer about what it must have been like to have witnessed the event as it occurred,
these performative objects seem radically disconnected from any other kind of interpretation. In
fact, they don’t seem to do much at all.

Part of this disconnect may have something to do with the antipathy of the performers
themselves towards object generation. The performances, after all, were actions rather than
visual spectacles. According to Amelia Jones, Chris Burden is said to have had exercised a high
level of control over how his performances were documented (staged for documentation as much
as for a live audience), and the selection of images for display in exhibitions and publications,
stating that, “Burden produced himself for posterity.” But apart from choosing the
documentation that he thought might give him maximum exposure and acclaim, there is little in
the documentation that speaks of anything else apart from what it is.

It is the viewer that is responsible for dissociating these images from the acts they depict, who,
while acknowledging that the events depicted actually happened, no longer requires them as
evidence. Decades of mass circulation have made that function redundant. Instead, contemporary
audiences repurpose the imagery for their own ends.

These newly functionless forms carry a similar autonomous presence to Benfield and Wojcik’s
props, and Duchamp’s *Fountain*. Each has come to the end of a process that fragments the
object’s history and purpose, widening the gap between artist and art-object. Each of these forms
comes to be as the result of a performance that, whether through characterisation, re-
contextualising or de-contextualising produces an object that has no place.

What is interesting to consider at this point is the possibility of the prop and documentation
taking a more influential role in the processing of the characterisation of the artist during the act
of performance itself, to assist with the act of dissociation, in addition to their described capacity
to be dissociated post-act. To enable this to happen, the props used in the performance and

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182 Ibid., 57.
documentation produced during the act need to be used by the artist as hypnotic, suggestive devices to will the fiction of the characterisation into reality.

In the next section I discuss this practice, focussing on the material processes necessary to bring these characters to life, and its effect on subjectivity, through an analysis of the alter Tor Rasmussen, also known as Kraken.

4.2 Kraken: Suggestion and Influence

Central to the research are the dissociative methods and means an artist requires to escape conditioned response, which I contend find their natural home within the bodymind of alters in dissociative play. Within this section, the focus is on the role of material in shaping that bodymind, and the material aftermath of its play.

In the previous section, I considered the dissociated presence of material de-contextualised through characterised, pseudonymous and absent author practices, but in this section I’d like to turn to discussing the influence of material (predominantly in the form of props and documentation) on fleshing out the characterisation itself, its effect on manipulating subjectivity, while also looking to the material qualities of objects generated in character, measuring their distance from the habitual subjectivity of their maker.

The discussion here evolves from previous commentary on the historic use of props and documentation outside live performance to consider their function within it, largely through the influence of suggestion and bleed. To analyse how each function, I’ll be putting my own dissociative play experiment Kraken under the microscope.184

Kraken (also known as Tor Rasmussen, fig. 4.8) is a voluntarily willed possession who I allow to take control of both body and mind, whose uninhibited character radically and temporarily transforms my subjectivity in a manner similar to the transformative experience of Keith Johnstone’s mask play, but with wider reaching implications for my subjectivity. Similar to the act of charging a mask, I wear a wig, makeup and a shoeless black uniform to ready myself for his arrival.

Within his alter bodymind, I write, draw, speak indecipherably, and interact with materials in ways I would customarily avoid, documenting the experience both during and after the event. As I

184 Chris Bond, Kraken, 2018, mixed media installation, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Southbank.
move in his bodymind through my home, and out into the backyard, I have little conception of what to do. Instead, in a state of heightened sensitivity and suggestibility, I approach the soil, trees and discarded tools as things completely unfamiliar to me. My hands move slowly over the surfaces of these forms, as if each grain and edge is being felt for the first time, then, after a moment, what needs to be done becomes more obvious.

I wrote earlier of the role of conscious control mechanisms in voluntary possession practices, and suggested that their absence may advantage a wider movement outside the self in certain circumstances. In Kraken I maintain conscious control only to limit the duration of the possession experience, the setting in which the experience happens, and the materials that I suggestively place for him to interact with. But elsewhere control is completely handed over - I place no restriction on how he uses the materials, and have no idea what might emerge or where he might take me, beyond acknowledging that his possession expands what I previously thought might be possible.

The possession, while providing an alternate subjectivity, impacts my own subjectivity after it has ended, largely through the memory and material evidence of what is generated in character—those utterances, thoughts, feelings and actions which I believe are not my own, but which, over time, I begin to possess myself.

Kraken exists. I know this because of my experience in character, perpetuated post-possession by talking about him as if he does, and with each subsequent successful attempt at getting in character, that belief is rewarded, renewed and amplified through the material generated through it.  

The materials generated through the possession, quite apart from their novel appearance and dissociated presence post-performance, have a specific dissociative function within the possessed act itself, as props that stimulate unconscious hypnotic suggestion. They work similarly to the automatic phenomena discussed previously, of the Ouija of Spiritualism, or the Magic Pendulum of Chevreul, through the unconscious expectation that they work.

Primary amongst the props used in Kraken are an ongoing series of emails (fig. 4.9, see appendix A) written in the first person while in character as Kraken, that assist in the maintenance of the

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185 Morton Klass comes to a similar conclusion about the nature of the possessing entity in spirit possession after decades of anthropological enquiry— that their presence, inside and outside possession, is very real. In Klass, 50.
hypnotic process by using narrative to literally script its reality, and suggest direction. Kraken, however, is not the only alter identity I assume in these emails.

A brief background to each of the alters and their relationship to the narrative thread follows.

The alter Kraken is a Norwegian artist who stayed at my house in late 2014 for a six week domestic residency facilitated by the fictional international arts residency program ArtStay. During this time he caused significant upheaval - threatening, annoying, tormenting, disabling and frustrating. Kraken is a corporeal representation of Freud’s id, a wild, animal-like, destructive, uncontrollable inner child. When writing in the email correspondence as Kraken a change takes place in patterns of thought, attitude and bodily position. Through a process of visualisation I feel him take over my limbs, my speech patterns. Within a few moments of visualising his form – the long black hair, the pale sinewy chest, the corpse paint dripping down the protruding chin – and with no apparent conscious effort, I find myself inside his bodymind having left myself somewhere behind, emerging free of constraint and logic.

Alongside Kraken I use the alter Chris Bond (fig. 4.10) as a documenter, observer, and victim of Kraken’s impulsive aggression. Bond shares my name, makes artworks under my name, and shares certain personality traits. But he is not me; he’s an autofiction who finds himself trapped in a self-invented narrative over which he has little control.

The third alter present in the email correspondence is the passive-aggressive regulator Julie Redfern, Manager of International Placement Programs at ArtStay (fig. 4.11).

Each of the alters writes in the first person in email interactions with each other, a simple but effective self-hypnotic technique. Each exist for a specific purpose, one to assert, one to submit, and one to regulate, but I leave the detail of their interaction entirely in their hands– they are responsible for building the narrative and placing me in what I consider uncomfortable psychological territory. Whether this is entirely of my own volition remains unclear, but their role in manipulating my subjectivity to consider new ways of being, acting and making is certain and effective.

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186 Robert Mitchell writes of the necessity for a similar ‘false logic’ narrative structure in the act of deception, where an invented script opens a ‘space’ for deception, where victims fill in gaps of logic largely by falsely observing what the narrative suggests they must, in Mitchell, 830. Here, the free space simply benefits the deceiver at the expense of a victim, but it is also opens a space that may allow, as I argue here, a potential for self-deceptive characterisation.

Throughout the development of the work I inserted props for the _alters_ to use, some invented before the process began as a way of establishing boundaries (such as the crate that Kraken sleeps in during the day, fig. 4.12), others planted for suggestion (materials, tools, fig. 4.13) and still others that emerged as a result of the email correspondence (artworks from my personal collection, fig. 4.14).

But the props were not necessarily always objects—they were also scenarios. And these scenarios, sometimes invented while in character through email correspondence, and at other times folded back into the correspondence by their actual experience through performed action, helped generate a bleed between each _alter’s_ subjectivity and my own, with the _alter_ impacting my subjectivity as much as I influenced theirs. A deliberate confusion of control within the narrative scenarios, made murkier by my use of an autofiction as one of the _alters_, was largely responsible for this breach in conscious captioning.

What emerged from this dissociative practice in terms of documentation was surprising given the limited setting I’d allowed the _alters_ to operate in. Each found novel ways of working around the conditions, taking advantage of my lack of conscious precognition of their movement and motivation. The photographic documentation, some amalgamated from several images to reconstitute the totality of what I felt occurred during a particular scenario (fig. 4.15), others depicting solo acts, show both Kraken and Bond engaged in activity that seems completely alien to me, but is nonetheless possible. In one scene, Kraken is observed using sculptural works pinched from Bond’s collection as a weapon (fig. 4.16), in another he sits atop a woodpile (fig. 4.17), in another he gouges holes (fig. 4.18). Other documentation is taken post-event (fig. 4.19, 4.20).

While I’ve allowed the process to run under its own steam, I’ve also incorporated techniques designed by Chekhov to gauge their effectiveness outside their conventional deployment in theatre. I developed a *psychological gesture* for Kraken, which consisted of a cane being repeatedly driven into the concrete floor of our home to charge his characterisation (fig. 4.21). And I’ve used imagery of myself in character as Kraken to stimulate visualisation.

Although his residency ended in late 2014, Kraken has returned at various points over the last three years, sometimes at my request, sometimes involuntarily when he recognised an opportunity to exert his influence. In early 2016 I received an email from Kraken (fig. 4.22) that referred to a burnt book he’d sent in the post (fig. 4.23). The arrival of the email and book

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188 *Kraken: rise*, in Chris Bond, *Kraken*, 2018
coincided with the development of a new body of work using Kraken’s presence as a tool for developing imagery and text. A series of painted books emerged from this process featuring Tor Rasmussen/Kraken as their author, including indecipherable titles from words I’d written while vocalising in character (fig. 4.24) and painted reproductions of in-character drawings (fig. 4.25, 4.26). In the 2016 email he mentions having seen images of these completed works on my website, and argued that his presence in my life is entirely fictitious, before warning of the risk of appropriating his name and persona in my practice.

The appropriation of his presence - his words, his bodily movements - into my painting practice offsets Kraken’s commandeering of my auto-fictive self’s sculptural works during his residency. But the appropriation represents more than just a balancing act-- it’s an acknowledgement of why he exists at all, which, despite his objections, is ultimately for my use and subjective benefit.

What is becoming increasingly evident through Kraken is a denial of the idea that the alter needs to be entirely independent of the host’s subjectivity in order to provide benefit. Logically the alter can never be completely captioned within a self-initiated process shaped by the unconscious motivation of the host.

The only requirement of the alter is to impact subjectivity, though the degree of that impact may vary. In fact if we look back through the writing to instances where advantageous changes in subjectivity are evident, whether in the subjectivity of the self-deceiver, the movement in the hypnotic to maintain the reality of the suggested fantasy state, or the involuntary movements that rattle the table in Spiritualism, the perceptible changes are often so small that they are almost imperceptible. But that does not mean that they are not significant, as the presence of any change in subjectivity, or any provision of benefit, signifies the possibility of more. All that is required for that change to occur is a belief in its possibility.
Figure 4.1. Alfred Stieglitz, *Fountain (photograph of assisted readymade by Marcel Duchamp)*, 1917, gelatin silver print, http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/originalcopy/intro05.html

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Figure 4.5. Marcin Wojcik, *Magic If* (installation detail), 2012, mixed media installation, https://www.flickr.com/photos/76298153@N05/7730906412/in/album-72157630948719078/
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Figure 4.8. Kraken/Tor Rasmussen

Figure 4.9. Printed book of email correspondence

Figure 4.10. *Alter* Chris Bond (L)

Figure 4.11. Julie Redfern’s business card

Chris Bond, Julie Redfern’s business card, 2014, ink on paper, 5 x 8 cm, in Chris Bond, Kraken, mixed media installation, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Southbank
Figure 4.12. Kraken’s crate

Figure 4.13. Implanted suggestive materials and tools

Chris Bond, *Kraken*, 2015, soil, branch, studio detail
Figure 4.14. Implanted artwork suggested by email correspondence

Chris Bond, *Kraken*, 2015, cane, studio detail
Figure 4.15. An amalgamation of two images featuring *alters* Kraken and Chris Bond

*Kraken (confrontation, movement)*, 2015, ink print on archival paper, 41 x 41 cm, in Chris Bond, *Tormentor*, 2016, mixed media installation, La Trobe University Museum of Art, Bundoora.
Figure 4.16. Kraken wields Chris Bond’s *Cane* as a weapon

*Kraken (breakdown)*, 2015, ink print on archival paper, 41 x 61cm, 2015, in Chris Bond, *Tormentor*, 2016, mixed media installation, La Trobe University Museum of Art, Bundoora.
Figure 4.17. Kraken sits on top of a woodpile

*Kraken (wood pile)*, 2015, ink print on archival paper, 41 x 61cm, 2015, in Chris Bond, *Tormentor*, 2016, mixed media installation, La Trobe University Museum of Art, Bundoora.
Figure 4.18. Kraken at work gouging holes

*Kraken (soil)*, 2015, ink print on archival paper, 41 x 61cm, 2015, in Chris Bond, *Tormentor*, 2016, mixed media installation, La Trobe University Museum of Art, Bundoora
Figure 4.19. Post-possession documentation of gouging

Chris Bond, *Kraken*, 2015, soil, studio detail
Figure 4.20. Post-possession documentation of a stripped tree branch

Chris Bond, *Tormentor* (detail, installation), 2016, mixed media installation, La Trobe University Museum of Art, Bundoora.
Figure 4.21. Kraken’s *psychological gesture*

Chris Bond

From: Tor Rasmussen <kraken666@internor.com>
Sent: Sunday, 10 January 2016 1:58 AM
To: chrispatrickbond@gmail.com
Subject: <no subject>

chris
on your way is a small burnt item
a bird spoke to me
of my spectral presence
do not be foolish
do not pretend that i am there as you work
that i speak to you
through you and for you
that i feel for you
i took a look at your website and made note of your use of the levitt library
for you to take the name of that place
and propose me as the author of your books
with titles apparently ripped from my tongue
is risky for you
by association
be wary
i can reach out
on my terms
a book is on its way to you
from the remains of that place
blackened to nothing
in the darkness
amongst the rows of paper minnows
i lit a match
and made something happen
try it sometime

tor

Figure 4.22. An email from Kraken/Tor Rasmussen

Chris Bond, Offering (Tor Rasmussen email), 10 January 2016, 2016, laser print, 30 x 21 cm, in Chris Bond, A Stranger in the Mirror, 2016, mixed media installation, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.
Figure 4.23. Burnt book sent from Kraken/Tor Rasmussen

Figure 4.24. A painted book using the authorship and persona of Kraken/Tor Rasmussen

Chris Bond, slagen igg grotten figgur, 2015, oil and acrylic on canvas, MDF, 2 x 25 x 20 cm, in Chris Bond, 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Magic Object, 2016, Adelaide
Figure 4.25. Drawing made in character as Kraken/Tor Rasmussen

Figure 4.26. Painted book showing the use of imagery generated in character

Conclusion

The notion that the embodiment of multiple alter subjectivities within a dissociative play visual arts practice might enable an artist to temporarily side-step the kinds of expectations, predilections and self-limitations that characterise single-subjective modes - allowing for the production of novel ideas, feelings and actions that appear to have been generated from somewhere outside of the self - has been addressed throughout the research, and categorically affirmed.

The degree to which this practice might be effective is determined by the self-deceptive faculty of the artist to believe that it is indeed possible, in spite of the reality that these novel outcomes are in actuality generated from within a body-mind already capable of their invention.

A wilfully dissociated, self-deceptive mind and a self-suggestive hypnotic environment are critical to the construction of an alternate reality to make this belief possible, especially within a singular visual arts practice where its continuance relies heavily on self-implanted stimulation to reinforce its legitimacy to its practitioner.

Forms generated through this mechanism also appear to have manifest somewhere beyond ordinary capacity, but their relative autonomy to the self is again something of a smokescreen, obscuring the truth that the capability to do so already exists within the non-characterised self. Still, the perception amongst both artists and audiences of the object’s characterised generation grants the object special significance and the chance of an extended life separate to the will of its creator.

Part of the role of the research is to reinforce the possibility of dissociative play in a contemporary visual arts climate currently defined by its absence. To assist with this, contextual support has been granted from far flung disciplines, domains in which the ability of a mind to voluntarily dissociate from habitual response is highly prized, in cultures where the practice rather than pathology of dissociation provides communal value and individual advantage.

Within these cultural contexts, mind and body work in tandem to allow a back and forth influence of the experience of subjectivity - of memory, thought, feeling and action - between host and alter, with one as likely as the other to significantly impact subjectivity. The chance of this bleed
occurring is increased if the embodiment of the alter is extended to include a representation of
the self as character, an autofictive self who shares the self’s name, and some of its history and
circumstances.

Further, the absence of voluntary submission to the mind of an invented other seems to offer
more advantage, reinforcing its reality to both subject and audience if it occurs within a
supportive cultural frame.

Agency has been a fundamental concern throughout the research, and arguing a case for its
possibility from within the conventional understanding of dissociation has been both a key aim
and great challenge. I’ve argued that the dissociated sensation of one’s body and mind being
manipulated by an external force or entity, seemingly disconnected from typical subjective
experience, is an augmentation of the subject’s selfhood rather than a pathological impairment,
and offers the potential for an expanded self-world relationship.

In order to justify this claim, a bridge between the pathology and practice of dissociation has been
assembled, with an eye for common benefit.

While a case can be argued for advantage even in the most extreme pathological instances of
dissociative identity disorder, the need to do so is less pressing if the dissociated experiences of
patients in experimental hypnotic settings are taken into account. Here, the research has found
that while the value of the dissociation may at first appear to exist exclusively for the scientist
leading the experiment, the range of creative manoeuvring undertaken by individuals seeking to
satisfy the demands of the experimenter’s external suggestion demonstrates that the desire to
fulfil it, and on significant occasions move beyond it, fulfils most of the criteria for individual
agency (achieved largely through subconscious regulation and the innate malleability of the
dissociated hypnotic state), which in turn points to individual benefit.

The evidence of these experiences provides an entry for artists wishing to voluntarily, willingly
and temporarily overcome perceived reality incongruence in self-hypnotic situations where they
strive to meet the demands of self-implanted rather than externally placed suggestions, extend
the duration and impact of the dissociated state, and with repeated effort enter and exit it fluidly.

Acting has been represented as an ideal in practice beginning point for understanding how one or
more dissociated subjectivities might exist in a mind and impact behaviour. The path of the actor
in negotiating conflicting subjective modes, captioning bleed between character and self, has led
the research into areas that are particular useful for distinguishing what is likely to impinge upon
subjectivity in the practice of dissociation. The research has established that the reluctance of the
actor to be possessed by their role is the greatest inhibitor to the likelihood of a long term influence of the experience of altered subjectivity, and that for any significant impact there must be a bleed between self and character.

When the focus shifts to cultural practices where bleed between self and character, or host and alter is instead actively encouraged, a wider impact on subjectivity is observed, and a path forward for the practice of dissociative play opens. Breaks or bleeds in conscious control processes in cultures of spirit possession are found to lead to the host being unable to differentiate between dissociated and non-dissociated experiences, allowing one to spill into the other, permitting an experience that reconciles the subjectivity of each.

Cultural context is critical to the practice of dissociation outside clinical expressions, but has a tendency to steer experience towards culturally sanctioned rather than autonomous expressions. The research has established that autonomous play, a significant motivator for individuals engaged in dissociative play in a visual arts context, is more likely to occur in practices that limit the number and influence of external contextual components. What has emerged from the comparative analysis of culturally encoded spirit possessions and possession practices in dissociative play has led to a significant point of departure – in the absence of an enveloping external context dissociative play possessions require only host and alter – its suggestive context self-generated and self-hypnotic.

This feature has been found in common with the practice of channelling, the closest of all currently existing cultural formations to dissociative play. Within channelling, there is frequently no audience, no socio-cultural context for its practice, and little communal advantage. The channel, much like the host in dissociative play, is a self-hypnotic conduit in which self and possession are balanced for mutual benefit, expanding and condensing what might otherwise feel like an imagined experience into a new and lively subjectivity.

The critical differences between the convention of imagined experience and the altered subjectivity of dissociative play, particularly when considered within the context of the visual arts, further distinguish dissociative play as an altogether new modus operandi. The embodied in-character experiences of the dissociative play practitioner differ from typical fantasy by the depth of experience and impact upon the subjectivity of the host, largely through the deregulation of boundaries between self and character.

In this it shares commonality with the position of the author as character in contemporary literature, where the idea of the self as a declaratory vehicle for the impact of the world upon its
subjectivity – a rarely questioned model for self-representations in the visual arts – is entirely moribund, and the author is instead a far more fragile construct. Here, the creator and self-representation negotiate and bleed, and what might have begun as fantasy impacts subjectivity by the suggested reality of the narrative context in which the author’s self-representation finds itself – their name, body and beliefs pushed, pulled and twisted.

Throughout the research a parallel argument has developed that thinking, feeling and acting within an imagined self is as valid, and more advantageous, than any imagined representation. And if that embodiment is able to be enacted without conscious detection, those thoughts, feelings and actions eventually become a self-perpetuating, materially generative reality.

Distinctions have been made throughout between different modes that express similar aims - of bypassing the self and conjuring multiple fictional personae to mark out new territory - between approaches that are voluntary and involuntary, consciously aware and consciously unaware, persistent and temporary. Each has been evaluated in terms of their impact on agency, freedom of movement and their ability to be materially productive.

I’ve argued that the best measure of the success of these alternative dissociative play modes is actually very simple: look at the quality of material generated in each, and measure the distance between it and what might be otherwise expected from the mind and hands of the practitioner. In certain instances, that material might be inadvertently produced as a prop to induce and extend the mode itself. In other instances, the material may come in the form of documentation, novel object-generation or narrative content initiation that assists during and after dissociation in the maintenance of the state’s requisite self-deception. In either case, the research has demonstrated that this material leaves a substantial mark upon the host artist’s subjectivity, on their self-deceptive capacity to extend what was previously thought possible, and muddies their intent– for artists as much as for audiences.

The research also makes clear that the subsequent de-functionalisation and de-contextualisation of objects made in dissociative modes extends the distance from the hand of the maker even further, allowing each object the chance to occupy a uniquely autonomous position beyond the fabricated circumstances in which it was initially conceived, having dispensed with the conventional reliance on deception and revelation that characterises art fiction.

It is important to restate that even the slightest difference in the appearance and function of objects produced through dissociative play from what might be ordinarily expected is significant,
as that difference, once detected, operates self-hypnotically in insinuating the possibility of more, and the potential of stretching the gap of expectation still wider.

Self-invented narrative scenarios have been found to be particularly useful in steering the *dissociative play* artist towards opening this gap further. Narratives in which the artist positions themselves as another, subject to the fictional circumstances in which they find themselves, have a tendency to become self-fulfilling as they subconsciously play themselves out while the artist is in character.

*Kraken* demonstrates this point particularly well. The embodiment of a character at the furthest possible remove from the artist, paired to an autofictive representation of the artist who is an active participant in self-generated narrative scenarios, creates a highly suggestive environment in which the *artist as character*, and *artist as self-like character* equally contribute to significant changes in subjective experience and material generation while dissociated *in* character, and tellingly, when *not*.

Such is the power of dissociation in reach and impact when the self is used as an operative character, granting a space for the *host* to believe in, and act out, the unlikely. Although it might be argued that such a capacity readily exists for those who simply invent *alter* characters and grant space for them to develop as autonomous beings, the decision to place a character that holds a likeness to the self in addition to these *alters* does much more, as it calls into question – quite literally – the command of the author in the development of narrative, and opens a psychology in which one might experience an unlikely subjectivity, rather than just imagine.

The interaction between the *host* - as a character of their own imagining - and the *alters* that the *host* wills into being, disrupts the continuity and limitations of singular, static subjectivities. The mind, the research has found, is able to fracture that singular condition when it senses advantage, overriding typical neurologic activity to establish a positive dissociated state, requiring only a belief in its possibility for it to be effective.
Bibliography


Norton, Louise. "Buddha of the Bathroom." The Blind Man no. 2 (1917): 5-6


Appendix A

Kraken: Text

Chris Bond, Kraken: Text (printed emails, 10 June - 17 December, 2014), 2015, ink on archival paper, bound, 31 x 22 x 2 cm, in Chris Bond, Kraken, mixed media installation, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Southbank
KRAKEN: TEXT

10 June - 17 December, 2014

Chris Bond
Dear Julie,

Please find attached an application for residence accreditation for 8 Kestrel Street, as discussed previously. I've attached the residence accreditation form, a house plan, a pdf containing 12 images of the house and garden, and a risk assessment made by Safety Compliance Australia in June.

Please let me know if any information is missing or needs to be changed.

Kind regards,

Chris.
Dear Chris,

Thank you for submitting an application for residence accreditation, international program.

Your application has been received and is currently being reviewed. A decision will be made shortly by our Arts Advisory Board, which is due to meet in late June.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions in the meantime.

With Kind Regards,

Julie

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Dear Chris,

Thank you for your recent submission for Residence Accreditation in our International Program.

Your application was reviewed by the ARTSTAY Arts Advisory Board, and we are very pleased to inform you that it was successful.

Please find attached a contractual agreement for you to sign and return at your earliest convenience. You may scan and email it back to me at this email address, or post it to the street address below.

We have a number of artists on file that are currently waiting for residency placement in Australia, and once we receive your confirmation contract, we will send you a shortlist of artists to choose from. You’ll note on the contract that we’ve stipulated a selection of three artists initially—one for the period October—November this year, and two more for the period March—May 2014. Please let me know as soon as possible if these arrangements work well with you, or if they need to be revised.

Once again, we would like to congratulate you on a successful application, and look forward to working with you on establishing your residency.

Warm Regards,

Julie

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Hi Julie,

Thanks for the email, I’m really happy that the application was successful! I’m looking forward to working with you too, and seeing the shortlist of artists. I’m happy with the idea of one artist in nov-dec this year, and two more in march-may next year, that all sounds fine to me. I’ve included fixed dates in the contract (attached), which work out to be five weeks each. Please let me know if anything is missing/incorrect and I’ll fix it up.

Kind Regards— Chris
Hi Chris,

Thank you for sending through the contract, it looks in order—please find attached as promised a shortlist of artists for you to look over. I’ve placed twelve names on the list, each with a short biography and sample of work. Please note, these artists are placed in no particular order, and final decisions regarding selection are yours. Once you’ve made your selections, I will contact the artists and confirm availability for those dates. If you’re having any trouble with selection, please let me know.

The artists included on the shortlist have been on a waiting list here for between 3-12 months, and have each indicated to me in the last few weeks that they’d be very happy to take up your residency should you select them, and would be able to fit in with the dates you’ve previously specified. In accordance with your preferences, please select one artist for November/December, and two artists for the March/May period.

If you could please aim to have the selections made by Monday 7 July, it would be very much appreciated. If you have any problems, please don’t hesitate to email me.

Happy selecting!

Best wishes, Julie

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Hi Julie,

Thanks for the list of artists, it was difficult to make a decision as they all seem so good. I’ve made the following selections:

Nov/Dec: Tor Rasmussen
March/April: Sylvia Hoffman
April/May: Daniel Vance

Could you please confirm that they’re available for those dates?

Many thanks, Chris
Hi Chris,

Thank you for being so prompt in getting back to me with the selections, they’re a good bunch you’ve chosen, though I must admit that both Terry and I were surprised that you selected Tor first up! You must like a challenge. I’ll confirm with the artists early next week and get back to you as soon as possible.

Best Wishes, Julie.

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Thanks Julie, Tor seems to fit perfectly, we share an interest in black metal—I’m looking forward to having him here. Sylvia and Daniel should provide some balance next year. Enjoy your weekend—Chris
Hi Chris,

I’ve spoken with each of the artists and both Tor and Sylvia have confirmed availability for those dates, which is fantastic news. Unfortunately Daniel is not yet able to confirm due to a possible exhibition commitment during April-May, but I should be able to give you a yes/no answer within the next week if that’s okay?

Tor has asked if he could send you an email directly to discuss logistical arrangements? As mentioned in the biography, his grasp of English is good, better than mine at times! If you’re uncomfortable with this at this early stage, I’d be happy to liaise between the two of you if that suits?

Best wishes,

Julie

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Hi Julie,

I’m fine with Tor contacting me directly, no problem at all. I’m happy to hold off on confirming Daniel for the time being.

Thanks—Chris
Hi Chris,

Good news– I spoke to Daniel Vance yesterday and he’s confirmed availability for the April/May timeslot, his exhibition commitments have been changed fortuitously to later in the year. I’ve also been in contact with Tor who will be in touch with you shortly.

Now that we have the artists and dates confirmed, I’ve attached a timeline of important dates to keep in mind. As stated in our information pack, ARTSTAY will handle all contractual obligations for resident artists, and liaise with you as regards stay timelines and any special requirements.

I’ll be in touch again in late September to make sure everything is on track, but in the meantime if you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes, Julie

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Great! Thanks Julie— Chris
Good evening to you chris
julie passed on your email
i hope it will be easier to deal with you directly than with the artstay folk who irritate with their bureaucratic earnestness
there a few things you need to know
we need to come to some sort of understanding about arrangements prior to my arrival
i work only at night and during the day i confine myself to a crate where i rest
it is the way i operate and allows for a feeling of ease and tightness
outside the day spins and is something for which i have little interest
if we cross paths at night i will most likely ignore you as i have pressing matters which require my full attention
please understand that i have a limited interest in your work which julie has brought to my attention
yet you are not without interest
you are more familiar to me than you realise
your head holds a truth
i have only a sketch of it and i will require more
do not interrupt the manner in which i approach the world or attempt to come to an understanding of it as that is futile
the crate is 2x1x1m and looks like a transportation vessel but i can assure you will fit the living room as outlined in your plan
i do not care what you do during the day as i wear earplugs
i do not eat much
but when i do it is from the garden and surrounds mostly berries and birds with brown rice which i source locally
i am telling you this because i am told i need to come up with these goods myself somehow without your assistance which is perhaps best for both of us
i have plans to make work in and from your garden of which i have seen images and am keen to interact
i take what i can get from the natural world and use it to my advantage
i see that you have children please rest assured i have no interest in interacting with them and if they can see fit to leave me alone in my vessel during the day i would be appreciative
chris when i say i am not interested in your work let me reassure you that it is not a personal disagreement but merely the way i navigate
you will get used to me in time and perhaps understand that the way i work is best for you and i
know that i am without feeling for humanity
if it withers and dies so be it
if it thrives and multiplies so be it
know that if we part without disgust for each other our time together will have been dishonestly spent
it is inevitable that you will despise me
but we will part with some kind of understanding once you have provided what i have come for
Tor
Hello Tor,

Great to hear from you. I’m really looking forward to having you stay here at the end of the year, I think you’ll enjoy it. The weather will be heating up at that point, but it won’t be too crazy like January or February.

I haven’t had any problems with the Artstay bureaucracy, but perhaps it’s been easier from this end. It was a complicated process to get the house accredited with the program but they haven’t given me any grief. You’ll be the first artist to stay here as part of the residency program, so apologies in advance if things don’t run smoothly all the time, no doubt there will be things we’ll need to work out, but probably won’t know about until they happen. Sounds like the food/meals situation might be one of those, I’m sure we’ll be able to sort something out when you get here. I don’t know if you’re going to be able to find the quantity of birds and berries here that you’ll need to sustain yourself though! Might need to take the occasional trip to the supermarket. We have plenty of shops around here within walking distance so that shouldn’t be a problem. Ideally we should be able to live and work in the same space in some sort of harmony and stay out of each other’s way most of the time. As I’ve mentioned to Julie, your living space will be separate to ours and I’ll do my best to keep unwanted interactions to a minimum.

I’m not surprised to hear about your sleeping arrangements. It seems to fit with the way you work and perform, and live, I guess. Speaking of which, I had a good look at your video work ‘Rest’ when I was looking through the shortlist of artists that Julie sent me, and I was intrigued by the setting, as well as your interest in interacting physically with your forms (I’m not sure what to call them). And was that a painted backdrop behind the bed, or was it a digital projection or print? It was hard to figure out given the lighting. And were you moving in slow motion or was that slowed down in post-production? Sorry to spray you with questions. If you need help with documenting what you’re up to during the residency I’d be very happy to help out, but it sounds like you’d much rather be left alone, which is fair enough.

If you have any questions, feel free to ask at any time. I’m also looking forward to chatting about our mutual interest in Black Metal at some point if you’re interested. I’ve known of your involvement in the scene for some time, in fact before I knew you were a visual artist, I saw that documentary made by Peter Varga a few years back that had some footage of you chanting bible verses backwards.

Let me know of anything I can do to make your stay here comfortable/worthwhile, I’m happy to help out.

All the best, Chris
Chris Bond

From: Tor Rasmussen <kraken666@internor.com>
Sent: Wednesday, 23 July 2014 1:34 AM
To: chrispatrickbond@gmail.com
Subject: RE: <no subject>

Chris
thank you for the weather update very informative
by your description you have a fine life enjoying the riches of nature
it is unfortunate then that i must grace your shores with my disgusting miserable presence and turn it all to ash
as you might imagine i do not like the heat of the summer
between you and i this was part of the issue with artstay as i stipulated on numerous occasions my preference for an australi
winter which was rejected
pack of slavish dogs who need a master
onto issue two
you have seen the documentary by varga
he neglected to show the part where i threatened to rip his balls off and shove them in his mouth
under no circumstances should i be filmed in daylight or halogen or fluorescence but he would not listen
it pays to listen to my needs
again and again and again
believe me on that one
it is for the benefit of all that my needs are met
speaking of needs
issue number three
birds
the ones with feathers
julie led me to believe that you live in some sort of sanctuary where things fly and crawl about and all i need do is sit around with a
net and wait for things to fall into it
but you are telling me i need to undertake a trek to a supermarket
rest assured that will be unnecessary chris
perhaps only for brown rice
it is true i have a limited diet and without the birds i am in trouble
the description says your house is surrounded by trees and parks and a creek so i can only assume that means birds chris
i have done my research and understand that it is spring in november down your way
in spring where there is a tree there is a bird
i have got through winters here catching a bird or two a week chris
berries i can search for
now i saw a photo of your backyard and there is a tree with berries near what looks like a trampoline
do not make me trek to the supermarket for berries chris when you have a plentiful supply
i am not asking for much just honesty
speaking of honesty take a closer look at rest
if you can’t figure out what the fuck is going on you need to get back to school
or get to your optometrist
but enough lessons from me
enjoy your way of life
feel free to vent your disgust but do not make excuses
as i have little patience for such things
Tor
Hi Julie,

I’ve been meaning to get in touch with you after some email correspondence with Tor Rasmussen last week.

He initially got in touch with me on Thursday 17 July and although his first email was a bit strange, it seemed fairly harmless.

I responded to him by email a few days later saying how happy I was to have him as a resident artist, and talked about some of our mutual interests, and what to expect here. His reply to that email late last week was somewhat surprising - it was aggressive and threatening. He seems to have taken issue with some of my comments, specifically in relation to what he might be able to eat here, and my interpretation of his recent video work. I’ve attached the emails here so that you can have a read. I’ll apologise on his behalf for his comments regarding your organisation, they’re bluntly offensive.

I’m guessing that you may have already experienced some of this already. Can you please let me know what I should do next? I’m prepared to give him another chance if he’s willing to apologise, but if he’s going to behave inappropriately like this when he’s here, I’d rather not have him.

Many thanks,

Chris.
Hi Chris,

Thanks for getting in touch with me about this. I’ve referred the emails on to our managing director Kate Samuels who will be getting back to me shortly with some advice.

Confidentially, we have had some issues with Tor.

For the moment please hang tight and do not respond to any further emails from him. I’ll be in touch with you before the end of the week.

Best wishes, Julie

Julie Redfern
Manager International Placement Programs
ARTSTAY

j.redfern@artstay.org.uk
ph +44 121 382 4178

Unit 5, 8 Lower Dartmouth St
Birmingham B9 4LA, United Kingdom

www.artstay.org.uk

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Thanks Julie, much appreciated — Chris
Hi Julie, just touching base quickly to see if there’s been any progress on how I should respond to Tor’s emails? I haven’t heard any more from him since.

Thanks, Chris
Hi Chris,

Sorry for not getting back to you earlier, we’re going through an auditing process at the moment and we’ve been swamped with extra work unfortunately.

On Friday last week I sent Tor an email outlining our codes of conduct for resident artists (which we also sent a few months back as part of the contractual process). I didn’t mention his emails to you specifically, as I didn’t want to put you in an awkward position, but I did remind him that any behaviour that steps outside the code may result in the termination of his residency. He hasn’t replied yet, but I’m hoping he’ll take it on board.

Maybe let things settle for a week or so, and wait for him to get back in touch with you. Please feel free to forward any further correspondence from him to me as we do take these matters very seriously.

Best wishes, Julie

Julie Redfern
Manager International Placement Programs
ARTSTAY
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Thanks for that Julie, will do— Chris
Chris
it has been a while since our last correspondence
i must assume that you are upset with me
i should apologise
the spit bites as it lands
it is the way i am and has landed me in trouble from time to time
shall we move on to a different place
rest assured you will come to no harm and i shall keep mannered
in six weeks i will arrive with a question and five further to an understanding
i trust the sun still shines for you
you will learn to understand my ways
it is for your benefit after all
Tor
Hi Tor, thanks for getting back in touch.

You’re right, I was offended by your last email and decided not to respond to it. But thank you for apologising. I’m hoping that we can move past it. If there are any further emails like that I’ll be forwarding them on to Julie Redfern, just to let you know.

I thought we’d better start working out some logistics. I understand from the timeline/key dates document that you’re going to arrive in Melbourne on Wednesday the 5th of November, and that your freighted items should arrive the week before. Is that still correct? I just want to make sure that the area of the house that’s been allocated to you is clear and ready for you to use.

All the best—Chris
Hi Julie, hope all is well.

Just a very quick email to let you know that Tor got back into contact with me yesterday by email, and apologised, in his own way, for the way he’s behaved. The rest of his email was full of his usual humour, if you can call it that. Most of it sounds like veiled threats to me, but I guess I’ll just have to get used to it. I sent a reply today accepting his apology, hoping that we can get back on track.

All the best — Chris
Great to hear Chris! Please let me know if any other issues arise.

Best wishes, Julie

Julie Redfern
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Yes chris you are on the money
my belongings will come before me
the shipping folk say wednesday 29 october or thursday 30 october to arrive at your house
under no circumstances should you unpack any of it
leave it in the allocated room and i will pull it out of shape when i arrive on wednesday 5 november at 235 in the afternoon
let us hope it is overcast
i will do my best with my heathen manners
Tor
Thanks Tor— Chris
Hi Tor,

I haven’t heard from you for a while and thought I’d better check in to see how you’re going with preparations for the residency. Is everything on track? I have the space here all cleared and ready to go, and I’ve also built a new deck area immediately out the back, which should make the back of the house more comfortable for you. Please let me know if you have any questions, and hope all is progressing well.

Kind regards, Chris
Hi Tor,

I thought I’d better send you another email to see how you’re going, did you get my email from Monday? Just wanting to make sure all is okay. I got a phone call from TranEx yesterday confirming they’ll be delivering all your things on Tuesday of next week, which is good.

Please let me know how you’re going.

Thanks, Chris
Hi Julie,

Hope all is well. Just a quick email to let you know I sent Tor an email on Monday last week to check how he was going, and I haven’t heard back from him. I sent him another email on Friday but I still haven’t had any response, and I’m starting to get a little concerned. Have you heard from him recently? I hope it’s all still going ahead, as I’ve spent a lot of time preparing the house for his arrival. The shipping company rang a few days ago to confirm that his items will be arriving on Tuesday, so I’m assuming everything is okay?

Many thanks, Chris
Delivery to the following recipient failed permanently:

j.redfern@artstay.org.uk

Technical details of permanent failure:
DNS Error: Address resolution of artstay.org.uk. failed: Domain name not found

----- Original message ----- 

DKIM-Signature: v=1; a=rsa-sha256; c=relaxed/relaxed; 
d=gmail.com; s=20120113; 
h=from:to:subject:date:message 
:thread-index:content-language; 
bh=6dqgRQl6jXGOTg4hA8/fVAnFjVwjQUemphjWZ4SFUE=; 
b=unZJPGuJWm35CEIrlX2YP+cVNdgyGWgjIps1TQEUKSjLmTLZC8AFxeEdaNNqYbxhbt5kg 
3HWurbYDnO/SGKDdd8cw6ZELoFiFmjkPab+thpi17KQNCcQ/PQ1avfKqLjVj4u4aD0N2 
yBTSBG+DA2WfuE50xuShu4T0P9wrUq0AXZ5O3HmyYjrMNzVITQFBzmnQ4JDowGnlm0n 
bkDrzRC5+L0sK08AATGkPETsNIT4ZeB+bECtN0WSYuE/S5ssVP798I3lo/D0yvod 
1QTeHDKHZn1zSwuJ/NZThJ4NZIDQKnDn5BzyU4PlODSejUGRNnBo8G/O8cDCYKYMGl6 
Kz1g== 
X-Received: by 11.66.230.147 with SMTP id zc9mr2587135pac.55.1423540695139; 
Sun, 26 Oct 2014 05:33:55 -0800 (PST) 
Return-Path: <chrispatrickbond@gmail.com> 
Received: from chrisPC (14.898.183.172.tpgi.com.au. [14.898.183.172]) 
by mx.google.com with ESMTPSA id mm9sm17703303pbc.76.2014.02.10.26.43.53 
for <j.redfern@artstay.org.uk> (version=TLSv1 cipher=ECDHE-RSA-AES128-SHA bits=128/128); 
Sun, 26 Oct 2014 05:33:54 -0800 (PST) 
From: "Chris Bond" <chrispatrickbond@gmail.com> 

To: <j.redfern@artstay.org.uk> 

Subject: Have you heard from Tor? 
Date: Sun, 26 Oct 2014 22:33:45 +1100 
Message-ID: <006b01d044e459f0e9f608d2b4e20$@gmail.com> 

MIME-Version: 1.0 
Content-Type: multipart/alternative; 
boundary="----=_NextPart_000_006C_01D4540.D27FD1C0"
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook 14.0 
Thread-Index: AdBE5JKAQm74r2xFROsU88hCYY2B4g== 
Content-Language: en-au 

Hi Julie,

Hope all is well. Just a quick email to let you know I sent Tor an email on Monday last week to check how he was 
going, and I haven’t heard back from him. I sent him another email on Friday but I still haven’t had any response, 
and I’m starting to get a little concerned. Have you heard from him recently? I hope it’s all still going ahead, as I’ve 
spent a lot of time preparing the house for his arrival. The shipping company rang a few days ago to confirm that
Hi Julie,

Apologies for emailing you at your private address (Greg Pender forwarded it to me). I tried to contact you this morning through Artstay and received an automated response saying your email address didn’t exist anymore. I tried the Artstay website and discovered that it wasn’t working either, then did a bit of googling and found out what’s been happening as a result of the auditing. I’m really sorry to hear about all this, I had no idea about it. Fingers crossed it will all blow over and you can get back on your feet soon.

As much as it pains me to raise this, I do have a few pressing issues that need to be addressed. The first is that I would have liked to have received some notice from you or from someone within Artstay prior to it being shut down, as Tor is meant to be here in a little over a week, and I have no idea whether anyone has been in touch with him about the residency not going ahead (I’m assuming that it won’t?). Also, all of his belongings are due to arrive here on Tuesday and I’m not sure what to do with them, or who pays to return them to him. On top of all that, Tor hasn’t responded to my email requests for him to get in touch in over a week, so I’m a little concerned on a few fronts. Has anyone from Artstay been in touch with him?

I’m sorry to lump all of this on you at what must be a difficult time, but I need some resolution asap so I can figure out what to do.

All the best, Chris
Hello Chris

I’m so sorry that no one got in touch with you earlier about the changes at artstay. During late September our auditors advised our governing body to suspend operation, and in the chaos that ensued, it appears that some of the residencies on our books were not notified of the suspension of their programs. I’m very sorry that this has happened as it’s obviously going to cause you some inconvenience.

We’ve been told there is a slight chance artstay could be up and running again by early next year with a new business structure, though that’s probably not going to be of much use to you at the moment.

As regards Tor, an assistant was given the task of getting into contact with him early this month and from what I can remember, he didn’t respond. To be frank with you Chris, I don’t think he’s going to come over for the residency. I would be surprised if he’s even paid for the airfares. I had concerns with him from the outset about his reliability and suitability, as he’s prone to wandering off and disappearing for long periods. You’ll probably be better off not having him there, for various reasons.

Unfortunately due to the insolvency issues, I’m not in a position to be able to offer funding to have his belongings returned. This cost is usually covered by the artist. I’m hoping that Tor will get back into contact with you soon to arrange to have his items shipped back. It might be worth asking the shipping company if Tor has already paid to have them returned at the end of the residency, in which case they may be able to take them straight back so that you don’t have to hang onto them.

Again, my sincere apologies Chris. It’s an awkward situation, and I wish I could do more to help.

Best wishes, Julie
Hi Julie— thanks for replying so quickly, I’ll ring the shipping company tomorrow and see if they can take Tor’s things back straight away. I think we can assume he’s going to be a no-show. If he hasn’t paid the return fee then I suppose I’ll just have to hang onto the items and return them when he can be bothered paying, though I have a feeling that’s not going to be an easy thing. Maybe I’ll give him two weeks notice to pay to have them returned or I’ll get rid of the items. You wouldn’t happen to have a phone number for Tor that I could try him on?

I’m disappointed that the residency is not going to go ahead, as I was (sort of) looking forward to having Tor here, plus having Sylvia and Daniel too, which sounds like it won’t happen either.

I’ll let you know when I hear from Tor, or when the items have been returned.

All the best, Chris
Hi Chris

Sounds like a good plan. Sorry I don’t have Tor’s number at hand as all the artist files are currently under lock and key, and it would breach contract to pass it on to you - not that that would appear to matter at this point - but I don’t want to get either you or I into any trouble. I’d suggest emailing him over the next fortnight, and yes, dispose of the items in a few weeks if he hasn’t paid for them to be returned already. You might get a few quid if you put them up on ebay!

Best wishes, Julie
Thanks Julie, I’ll let you know how I go—Chris
Hi Tor,

I haven’t heard from you in a long time, and having recently been in contact with Julie Redfern, I believe you haven’t been in contact with her either. I suspect you already know that Artstay was declared insolvent in September and has since been wound up. I only found this out today after trying to get in touch with Julie to see if she’d heard from you.

She’s informed me that all residencies and artists were supposed to have been notified in late September of these changes, and that as a result, all current and future residency programs had been suspended. I’m assuming that’s why you haven’t been in contact.

I’m sorry that this has happened as I was looking forward to you coming over here, and I’ve put a lot of effort into getting the space prepared for you.

There’s just one matter that needs to be resolved at this point, and that’s what to do with your belongings that were sent in advance, and due to arrive here on Tuesday this week? If you’ve already paid for the return of the crate, could you please ring TranEx to authorise them to return them immediately to you? That would save a lot of hassle. If I don’t hear back from you by tomorrow morning I’ll ring the company myself and see if I can arrange it. If you haven’t already paid for their return, can you please do so as soon as possible? I’m also thinking that TranEx may be able to hold the items until you pay?

Thanks, Chris
Hi Tor,

I rang TranEx this morning, and apparently you haven’t paid for the crate to be returned, and to further complicate matters they are unable to hold it in their storage area unless you authorise them to do so. Unless they hear from you by 10am tomorrow morning (I’m guessing that’s about midnight in Norway) they will have to deliver the crate here to Strathmore Heights, and you’ll have to arrange to get it transported back to Norway from here.

TranEx’s phone number is +61 3 8366 7132 or email John Falcoe at jfalcoe@tranexaus.com.au

I’m not sure if you’re getting my emails or just choosing to ignore them, but if you could please respond and organise the return transport I won’t bother you again.

Thanks, Chris
Hi Julie,

Just a quick update on what’s been happening here - I’ve tried to get in touch with Tor, but no luck. I rang the shipping company yesterday morning and he hasn’t paid for the crate to return, and unfortunately they can’t hold it there without his authorisation, so it’s on his way here now. A bit of a crazy situation but there’s nothing I can do about it apparently.

As soon as it arrives this afternoon I’m going to email Tor to let him know he has two weeks to arrange to have it returned to Norway, or I’ll be throwing it in the tip.

Thanks, Chris
Hi Tor,

TranEx have just delivered your crate, and since I haven’t heard from you, I thought I’d better let you know that unless you arrange to have it returned to Norway in the next two weeks, I intend to dispose of it. I’m not going to hassle you about it anymore, but if I don’t hear from you, you’ve been warned about what’s going to happen.

Thanks, Chris
Hi Chris

Thanks for letting me know, it’s a very unfortunate situation but you’re doing the right thing.

Best wishes, Julie
Hi Julie,

You’re not going to believe this —

Tor rang me from Melbourne airport a few hours ago, I drove down and picked him up...he’s here now.

I’m a bit shaken up — I can’t comprehend why he’s decided to travel here after everything that’s happened over the last month? He claims he was off hiking from mid-September up until about a week ago (my last email from him was on September 16) and neglected to check his emails, so he had no idea the residency program had been axed until I spoke to him in the car, which I don’t believe.

He’s insisting on staying, and to be honest I don’t know what to do with him? Should I ask him to leave? He’s a bit full on— he cracked it when I arrived to pick him up because he’d had to wait in a shelter for 30 minutes. He has a strange body odour that I can’t figure out. His speech is also quite odd, it’s measured and staccato, like his emails. And his appearance, well, I can’t figure out whether he’s lampooning black metal aesthetics or actually living it. People at the airport were laughing at him. But he seems happy enough to be here, and I don’t want to stress him out. We’re going to be ‘best buds’ apparently. He’s taken himself to bed (his shipping crate is his bed, with the lid on, I don’t know how he’s breathing in there) and he won’t be up until after sunset. He seems to be asleep now so I’ve snuck into another room to send you this email. I really don’t know what to do next.

Hoping you can offer some advice — Chris
Hi Julie,

Did you happen to get my email on Wednesday? Tor’s still here, he’s a bit unhinged but we seem to be getting along okay. He says he hasn’t got enough money to pay for an earlier airfare so I guess I’ll be stuck with him for the next six weeks.

Would appreciate some advice on what to do next—Chris
Hi Julie,

I’m guessing you must be on holiday or having trouble with your emails. Could you please get in touch when you receive this?

Thanks, Chris
Hi Julie,

I haven’t heard from you and I’m in a bit of a state here. I don’t know what to do with Tor. Sorry, not ‘Tor’, he’s insisting I call him ‘Kraken’. His behaviour has been very disruptive—he’s been making a lot of noise outside at night and I’ve been getting complaints from my neighbours, who aren’t happy. They have young children and are frankly a bit creeped out, and we are too. He’s been catching birds with a net at sunrise and eating them raw. I find scraps of bones and feathers each morning, it’s really disgusting. He’s also taken some of my sculptures as his personal playthings, doing god knows what with them at 4am in the morning. I come out in the morning to holes gouged out of the ground and mutilated tree branches. He says very little to me, but when he does it’s very odd, asking questions like ‘why are you here’ and ‘who are you’ in his monotone way, while he looks at me expressionless. At dinner time he stares at us through the window from outside. I’ve told the kids that it’s just him showing interest in us, but it makes all of us feel really uncomfortable. Amelia’s insisting I call the police to get rid of him, but I’m worried it might cause more trouble than it’s worth. He hasn’t threatened any of us, in fact he hasn’t said a word to Amelia or the kids, which is a relief. When I’ve tried to talk to him about his behaviour he just turns and walks away, muttering in Norwegian.

I don’t know what to do, I just want him gone, but I don’t want to make things worse. Any ideas?

Chris
Chris, I’m sorry but my solicitor has advised me not to respond to your emails.

Julie
What? I don’t understand why, what’s the issue? From my position you and artstay have a legal obligation to sort out the mess I’m in, you need to take responsibility for that. I’m going to continue to send you emails about what’s happening here anyway, and you can chose to ignore them, that’s up to you, but at some point you’re going to have to step in and fix all of this. How much more do we have to take?

I’m going to call the police to try and get him out. I’m not sure on what grounds, but we can’t take much more of him. If I don’t call the police I’m sure the neighbours will do it anyway, as they’ve had enough.

Calling the police will most likely impact on you and your organisation, so if you want to respond and do something about it, now’s your chance.

Chris
Julie,

I called the police this morning to get them to sort this out. They came over an hour ago when I assumed Tor would be in his crate, but for some reason he wasn’t in there when I opened the lid. I’m guessing he overhead me calling them and snuck out? I couldn’t find any ID or other documents in his bags either. Now they’re going to contact customs/immigration, they didn’t go into any details, but I’m hoping it’s to figure out how to deport him. I gave them your email too.

Chris
Hi Julie, I’m figuring you’re probably not going to respond to this, but you need to know what’s been happening here, the police rang this morning and haven’t found any record of Tor entering the country, no passport was ever presented to customs either here or in Norway, and none of the airlines issued him a ticket during the time he was supposed to be travelling. I’m thinking that he must have travelled under an assumed name.

Can you please send an email to Victoria Police Detective Alex Forten aforten@vicpol.vic.gov.au to confirm that he travelled here? You must have some record of it? I don’t have any of the contractual documents that he signed with you, and I don’t even have his Norwegian home address. They say they’ve tried to contact you by email, but you haven’t responded.

The police asked to speak to Tor on the phone this morning, but he refused to talk. When I got back on the phone the detective seemed angry and confused, and I got the feeling he thought it was some kind of hoax. It’s incredibly frustrating, I really need you to step in and help.

Chris
Julie,

I’ve been in contact with the police again and they still haven’t received any email from you. I shouldn’t be surprised, but I had hoped that you could at least send them something out of respect for the situation here. But apparently not.

To make things worse, they’re refusing to return to speak to Tor, apparently it’s a waste of their resources. They’ve also asked me to no longer contact them unless I have a ‘serious’ complaint! They’ve found no record that Tor is here. I even got Amelia to ring them, and one of the neighbours too, but it hasn’t made any difference. They don’t believe he exists.

What am I supposed to do now?

Chris
Julie redfern
the nights are short here so i will keep this brief
you tried your best to stop me
you could have tried harder but it would have made little difference
i am the lark that ascends to the highest knave
to see all
from here my song breaks
now chris has been a patient host but has yet to give me what i need
perhaps i will ask him directly
julie soon i will return and hold you to account
K
Hi Julie,

I’m sorry, but it looks like Tor has managed to find his way into my computer and I believe he may have sent you an email last night, or early this morning. I’ve tried to retract it but it looks like it might have got through. I honestly didn’t think he’d do something like that, I’m really shocked. I keep the laptop in my room at night so he must have crept in while we were asleep.

Chris
Hi,

A bit of an update just in case you’re interested, though who knows if you are or not—I went to the police yesterday about Tor hacking into my emails, and—this is going to sound familiar—they’re not going do anything about it. On top of that, they’ve told me they will issue me with an infringement if I contact them again.

So that’s it, I give up. I do wonder what will happen when he does eventually leave (which he insists he will be at the end of the five weeks), how the hell he’s going to be able to get through customs if there’s no record of him coming here in the first place?
I’ve officially given up on getting rid of him. He’s not going to leave until the five weeks is up so I’ve decided to take a different tack. He’s agreed to be documented going about his nightly activities, which I’m thinking I might be able to integrate into some new work. At least I’ll get something out of this mess. We’ll see what comes of it. I’ve attached a few early photos here. He’s a strange creature...
Julie, some observations to pair with the photos I sent earlier in the week, things have settled down here, and I’ve got to the point where I feel comfortable watching him, similar to how he treats us, always staring. I realise that what follows will probably sound like narration but there’s no other way of getting across how strange he is...

He’s quieter. I’ve been outside in the backyard at night, sometimes at 2 or 3 in the morning and the only sound is the crunch of twigs snapping underfoot, and the scraping of hand tools against tree branches as he works. To his credit he’s making far less noise than before, which is a relief to everyone.

He insists on everything, there is no compromise, no other way than his. It’s fruitless to fight or bargain.

Increasingly I have nothing to say to him. I’ve tried over the past few weeks to engage him on topics he might find interesting but I only get terse, monosyllabic responses. He says nothing at all unless he’s asked, he just motions to me with flicks of his hand.

Sometimes while he works outside I put the timer on the camera and enter the frame, which causes him discomfort. It’s all I have left, a small point of antagonism.

Early this morning I heard a sharp repetitive tapping noise in the lounge and, grabbing my camera, came out to have a look. He was emerging from his crate, using a cane I’d made for a show next year, driving it into the concrete floor to help himself up. He’d stand, then settle back into the crate, before going through the process again. He did it at least fifteen times while I stood in the corridor, watching and recording video, before he sensed my presence. He locked his unblinking eyes on mine as he slowly lowered himself back into the crate, flinging the cane violently across the room before sliding the lid back over.

There are a lot of things he never seems to do. He doesn’t blink. He doesn’t smile, in fact, he rarely shows any facial expression. I’ve never seen him eat, or even drink, but he must eat, as I’ve seen the remnants of meals of birds and berries strewn across the back lawn, and unwashed saucepans encrusted with brown rice stacked in the sink. He doesn’t shower. He doesn’t appear to use the toilet. I don’t know if he’s ever left the house and backyard. He’s still getting through the large sack of brown rice I bought for him so he hasn’t needed to leave to shop for anything.

He must exercise as he has almost no body fat, he’s all sinew, and moves with a strange fluidity. He never stumbles, even in the dark.

Chris
Julie—

I feel sick, something very strange is going on here. On Saturday night I tried to talk to Tor about leaving, as his flight is on Wednesday, two days from now. He lay silently in one of the deck chairs, unresponsive. As I got up from where I was sitting his hand reached out and grabbed my arm, just above the elbow. His grip was immensely powerful. He pulled me back to the chair and motioned for me to sit back down.

He had a story to tell, he said... not so much a story as a reminiscence. I’ll try and recall it as closely as possible. He spoke rapidly and articulately. I’ll admit right now that I don’t really believe it, it seems so fanciful, but that said I can’t imagine why he’d make it up?

About thirty years ago, when he was in his late teens and still living with his parents, he woke late one night to the sound of an explosion. Lying in bed, wondering if he’d dreamt it, he began to hear distant cries for help, and got up to investigate. His parents were still asleep as he slipped out the front door. He could smell petrol and smoke, and in the empty block across on the corner he was confronted by the sight of an upturned car, which had veered off the icy road, flipping over a mound of building rubble.

In the gloom and smoke-filled air he could see the torn-apart remains of a young couple, a woman with intensely red hair (red like burning blood, in his words), and a man with bright blue hair. Like polarities, he said. They were both clearly dead, the man half thrown through the windscreen, and the woman crushed by the car’s steering column. Feeble cries came from the back seat, where a young child lay covered in blood. As Tor attempted to prise the rear door off to rescue him (he must have been far less misanthropic in those days) the boy held up his hands in panic, grabbing a sheet of paper from the back seat, trembling.

On the paper was a drawing. It was of a man’s face, slim and smooth-skinned, peppered with stubble, with short greying hair, meticulously rendered in pencil.

The child died of blood-loss in the ambulance on the way to hospital, and Tor kept the drawing to himself. He read about the boy’s family in the paper a few days later— they’d travelled from Estonia on the advice of a local seer to visit a renowned Norwegian healer, as the child had been suffering from recurring nightmares of a tall, thin man who would threaten, pursue and slaughter him. The face of the man had been drawn by a local artist based on the child’s recollections, and it was that drawing that Tor now had possession of.

For many years, Tor kept the drawing to himself, before using it as the basis for a performance piece in which he tried to recreate the events of that night using trained native animals as stand-ins for the family members, and locally sourced timber for the vehicle (I found a video online that confirms the performance, at least).

About four years ago, while researching visual artists who use black metal music as source material, Tor came across an obscure article about my work, which happened to make reference to my website. On looking at it, he found an image of me, or, to be more accurate, an image of that face in the drawing.

The likeness was apparently uncanny.

Tor wasn’t sure what to do. He felt like travelling to Australia to confront me with the similarity (for what purpose?), but he had no funds to do so. By chance, he decided to register with your organisation as he wanted to further his travels. Astonished, he was told that I was in fact offering my residence as a venue.

I listened to him as he spoke but of course I didn’t believe a word of it. Then he pulled a worn, folded wad of paper
from his pocket and threw it on the table in front of me.

‘Open it,’ he said.

I picked it up and examined it. It was clearly old, and had a strange odour, like formaldehyde. I opened it carefully, but dropped it quickly back onto the table when I realised it was covered in dried blood.

‘Open it,’ he repeated.

Tor stared at me intently. I wondered if this was some kind of test. I tried to edge out of the seat, but he grabbed my arm and squeezed it so hard I thought he’d break it. Clearly impatient, he unfolded the paper in front of me, smoothing it out, before jabbing at it with a dirt covered finger.

‘It’s you,’ he said.

I stared at the blood stained, smudged drawing. He was right, it was me, unmistakably. After a moment of silence he folded it back up, stuffed it into his pocket and walked off.

Since then I’ve barely slept. I tried to ask him about it earlier this evening, but he just loped away and squatted underneath one of the trees near the back fence, staring blankly at the ground. He looked up as I approached, and bared his teeth at me, snarling.

I turned and walked back inside feeling sick to my stomach.

Julie, I know you’re not planning on responding to my emails, but if you do read this can you please tell me if you know anything about Tor’s drawing? I have a feeling that you may know something.

On top of all this, Amelia has threatened to take off with the kids if I don’t get things sorted out, she says she’s had enough of all this and thinks I’m the one that needs help.

Chris
Chris,

For reasons which will become apparent here, I’ve decided to get back into contact with you. I’ve read all the emails you’ve been sending, but have not been in a position to respond until now.

What I am about to tell you is strictly confidential, and I’d ask that you delete this email permanently after you’ve read it. My lawyer has asked that I not contact you, but you do have a right to know what’s going on, so I’m sending this from an email account I’ve set up secretly to avoid getting into any legal trouble. We can communicate through this address for the time being.

Chris, Tor is not who you think he is. From the moment I first met him, at an exhibition opening in Manchester just before he applied for the residency, I had some suspicions. Something about him just didn’t seem entirely genuine. He’s a very clever manipulator, very charming when he needs to be. He’s a sociopath. I’ve met a lot of them over the years, but none like Tor. He uses self-insight and self-deception to help him lie convincingly— he believes his own stories.

His real name is not Tor Rasmussen, but Peter Hagen. Tor Rasmussen is an assumed name, one amongst many. I found this out only a few weeks ago after speaking to a previous associate of his at a Nordic cultural fund dinner. Tor/Peter was born in Sweden, and was orphaned at the age of nine after his parents were killed in a car accident just outside his family home, an accident that he apparently witnessed from his bedroom window. His parents had gone out for the night leaving him in the care of a babysitter, a young woman named Anna Lindgren who had looked after him many times before, over several years I believe. Anna was the daughter of one of the founders of a Norwegian Neo-Nazi cult called Kryssild (Crossfire), and had apparently successfully indoctrinated Peter into their belief system (they’re all over the web if you want to find out more). Peter holds Anna responsible for his parents’ deaths as he claims he saw her at the front door pointing a golden rod at the car just before it overturned. Whether this part of the story is true or not is debatable as Peter is prone to confabulation, as his now estranged friend readily admits. But I’ve managed to verify the rest of it.

After the deaths, and having no other family to take care of him, Peter was placed in the care of an estranged aunt by the name of Hedda Ström who made his life a misery through repeated beatings and paranoid accusations. One day, around the time Peter was sixteen, Hedda suddenly vanished, taking a few of her belongings into the mountains. She left a note to Peter saying not to expect her to return, and she never did. Police were suspicious of the circumstances of her disappearance, which was out of character, and by the validity of the note too, but they took no action. Hedda was never seen again.

Over the next decade Peter used his aunt’s home as a compound, stockpiling weaponry and food supplies in advance of an imagined race war. He also used this time to develop several aliases under which he now operates, including Tor Rasmussen/Kraken, who had a substantial interaction with the black metal scene in Norway, which I believe you have some interest in. He was briefly jailed for weapons offences in the early 2000s, but was released after less than a year served due to good behaviour. Upon his release he managed to legally change his name to Rune Haugen, continuing to use the stage name Tor Rasmussen for his artistic endeavours.

In 2006, he was listed as a missing person by his then girlfriend, before he resurfaced in 2008 in the Norwegian fishing village of Reine in the Lofoten Archipelago, a string of islands in the Arctic Circle. He claimed to have had no memory of how he got there, or where he’d been for the past two years, but during the time he was absent, four founding members of Kryssild were kidnapped, tortured and dismembered. No one was convicted for the crimes.

Since then he has operated as something of an enigma, going underground and resurfacing in various European art scenes. From all reports he hasn’t made himself many friends.

What I’m going to tell you next must be kept between you and I, please. I must stress that it is at the stage of allega-
tion only. It involves a female staffer of ours (I’ll withhold her name) who became somewhat enamoured with a man she thought was a struggling Swedish film-maker, and allowed herself to be manipulated into siphoning a significant proportion of artstay’s funds into one of the film-maker’s bank accounts. This has only come to light in the last few months, and is the key finding of the auditing process. This has yet to be made public. Of course, the man has long since disappeared. But I believe that man is Tor. I think he deliberately targeted the staffer after I made mention of her at our initial ‘chance’ meeting in that Manchester gallery. I’d perhaps had a little too much to drink and divulged some details about her personal life which in retrospect I regret.

I wish that was the sum of my regrets. But there’s more. Somehow I think he must have known that you were planning on establishing a home-based residency well before you applied for accreditation, because he showed me that drawing you’ve referred to when he came in for an interview earlier this year. He pointed at the drawing and said that ideally the residence we pair him with should be able to ‘answer’ the drawing. He insisted that he be placed in Australia, as close to Melbourne as possible. He said doing so would be ‘mutually beneficial’, and stared at me until I cracked and said I’d do the best I could. I remember his words specifically, as I did the content of the drawing. I must admit I was confused by his behaviour, and intimidated. How he could have known you were soon to apply to artstay is difficult to say. Or it may be a coincidence that you resemble the man in the drawing. I don’t think so, though.

When you applied for accreditation, I took a quick look at your website to find out a little more about you, and was taken aback when I saw your headshot. I instantly recalled the drawing that Tor had brought in months earlier. Your face and the face in the drawing looked almost identical. I spoke to Terry about the resemblance and he thought I was mad. I was starting to get very concerned, and it got worse when I began to receive emails from Tor that were, like the ones you received, bizarre and threatening. He seemed obsessed with Australia, again insisting we place him there as soon as possible. I sent him a number of emails requesting that he be patient, which he took offence to, and I should have gone to the police at this point, but I didn’t, I don’t know why exactly.

When it came to compiling the shortlist of artists for your residency, I told Terry that we should take Tor off the list, but he thought I was being ridiculous, and insinuated that I was suffering from some sort of delusional complex. Terry and I are close but something didn’t feel right about the way he rationalised Tor’s inclusion. But I put Tor back on the list anyway. That was a mistake. When you agreed to take Tor as your first resident my heart sank and I felt sick for you, but even then I could have got rid of him. But I didn’t, I’m not sure why. I just felt compelled to do it. Tor has a way of getting inside your head, I can’t explain it.

I have another admission to make. I never passed the threatening emails Tor sent you onto our director Kate Samuels. I’m sorry Chris, I felt so compromised I didn’t know what to do. I did send Tor an email outlining our codes of conduct, but I have no idea if he read it or not. Probably doesn’t make any difference at this point, I suppose.

I can’t apologise enough Chris, particularly for the impact that this is having on you and your family, and I know that in time I’m going to be held accountable for it. In the meantime, my only advice would be to just keep playing along with him, and hopefully he’ll be gone in two days’ time, as he’s indicated to you. Please don’t go to the police again as I fear this may tip him over the edge. I realise I should do more from this end, but I’m not convinced it will help you, it might make things worse.

I’m so sorry.

Julie
Julie,

I’m not sure how to respond to what you’ve just sent. You had so many chances to do something and you did nothing. And you’re still doing nothing. I will take your advice however and sit this out. Given what you’ve told me, who knows what he’s capable of?

And I’ll be hanging onto all of your emails until this is all cleared up. There’s absolutely no way I’m deleting them, sorry. Well, I’m not sorry, I’m not, at all.

Chris
I understand your frustration with me Chris, but please do the right thing and delete these emails. Once Tor has boarded the plane back home, I will take responsibility for all this, I promise.

Julie.
Julie, I don’t think you ever will. I believe you as much as I believe Tor.

Chris
He’s just gone berserk. I was outside earlier, and I thought, I’m not going to waste any more time pretending like everything’s okay, because it’s not. Amelia and the kids have had enough, and have left to stay with my mother in law for a few days. Wise decision as it turned out.

He was on the deck, pacing back and forth, glaring at the woodpile over on the left. I came out, waiting to get his attention. After staring at me for what seemed an eternity, he asked, ‘why are you in my drawing?’

I replied, ‘It’s not me, Peter.’ You should have seen the look on his face, it was fantastic Julie, like a mountain collapsing into itself. I raced back inside to grab the camera as he started screaming in Norwegian.

As I returned outside, I slipped past him quickly and hid behind the eucalypt tree in the back corner. Through the branches and leaves I could see him grabbing some sculptural works I’d stored in cases, and without even bothering to take off the bubble wrap, he started smashing them into the windows, before grabbing the shards and slicing them into his arms and across his chest. I took photos.

After what seemed like a long time, but was probably only a minute or so, he slumped into one of the deck chairs, blood streaming from his upper body. He motioned for me to come forward. I approached cautiously, unsure of what he was planning next. Without looking at me he said, very quietly, ‘bandage.’ I went inside and spent the next half hour dressing his wounds, removing shards of glass that had become embedded in his arms. During this time he said nothing at all, didn’t even move, or flinch. He seemed to have entered some kind of semi-conscious, trance-like state.

He’s still out there, in the same position. None of the neighbours have come over to check what’s going on, it’s silent, strange. Not sure what to do next, I guess just leave him there?
Jens Rønning

From: Jens Rønning <jens666@internor.com>
Sent: Wednesday, 17 December 2014 5:18 AM
To: julie redfern <redread@internor.com>
Subject: <no subject>

its done
on way back soon
you want me to leave the drawing with him?
Yeah, okay, leave it under his bed. Just make sure you get rid of everything else
see you at gardermoen
He’s gone Julie, finally.

I dropped him off at the airport this morning and his crate has just been picked up. It’s over.

Yesterday was a strange day, I caught him laughing at one point, he was sitting on the edge of the crate, running his hands over his bandaged arms. It was about 10 in the morning. I don’t think he’d slept since the night before.

He looked happy, and gave me the thumbs up when I walked past.

Just after lunch he asked for my phone. He rang a glass company and organised for someone to come over in the afternoon to fix the windows, which I had to pay for of course.

We spent the rest of the day cleaning up. He didn’t say anything, but hummed as he worked. I offered to cook him some dinner, but as usual he refused. As the sun set he took himself outside, and sat in the deckchair which was still covered in blood. I went back to my room and fell straight asleep.

He was packed and ready to go when I got up this morning. His crate was sealed, and the house seemed cleaner than usual. He’d put away all the dishes, wiped down the benches, and neatened the piles of branches in the backyard.

He stood at the front door with his backpack on.

‘It’s time,’ he said.

I quickly got dressed and drove him to the airport. We said nothing on the way. As we pulled up at international departures, I felt like he was about to say something.

But he said nothing— he just grabbed his backpack, got himself out of the car and disappeared into the crowds.

He’s gone.
Appendix B

*Kraken*, exhibition documentation

Chris Bond, *Kraken*, PhD examination exhibition, mixed media installation, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Southbank, February 2018
Chris Bond, *Dor veirren stic fer lent*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *Vor mir vell ect*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *Kier in kter ver feer*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *Rahn cirekrek*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *704.949133*, 2016, oil on canvas, fabric, paper, card; *LE VITT-FROM ASHES*, 2016, oil on canvas, fabric, paper, card.
Chris Bond, *Dor veirren stic fer lent*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *Vor mir vell ect*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *Kier in kter ver feer*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board; *Rohn cirekrek*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board.
Chris Bond, *Dar veirren stic fer lent*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board.
Chris Bond, *Vor mir vell ect*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board.
Chris Bond, *Kier in kter ver feer*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board.
Chris Bond, *Rahn cirekrek*, 2016, oil on canvas, calico, board.
Chris Bond, 704.949133, 2016, oil on canvas, fabric, paper, card.
Chris Bond, *mortgin kinerok eir sig cranchniholtvagen*, 2015, oil and acrylic on canvas, calico, MDF; *vulhun krag*, 2015, oil on canvas, calico, MDF.
Chris Bond, mortgin kinerok eir sig cranchniholtvagen, 2015, oil and acrylic on canvas, calico, MDF.
Chris Bond, *vulhun krag*, 2015, oil on canvas, calico, MDF.
Chris Bond, *Construction*, 2018, photographs, soil
Chris Bond, *Construction* (detail), 2018, photographs, soil
chris
on your way is a small burnt item
a bird spoke to me
of my spectral presence
do not be foolish
do not pretend that i am there as you work
that i speak to you
through you and for you
that i feel for you
i took a look at your website and made note of your use of the levitt library
for you to take the name of that place
and propose me as the author of your books
with titles apparently ripped from my tongue
is risky for you
by association
be wary
i can reach out
on my terms
a book is on its way to you
from the remains of that place
blackened to nothing
in the darkness
amongst the rows of paper minnows
i lit a match
and made something happen
try it sometime

tor
Chris Bond, *Crate*, 2015-2018, ply, pine, canvas, soil; *The Devil’s Spit (cane)*, 2015, oil, acrylic and soil on timber; *The Devil’s Spit (dagger)*, 2015, acrylic and oil on timber; *The Devil’s Spit (club)*, 2015, acrylic and oil on timber, obsidian, cord; *Julie Redfern’s business card*, 2014, ink on paper.
Author/s: Bond, Christopher

Title: The kraken’s reach: manipulating subjectivity through dissociative play

Date: 2018

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/212533

File Description: Redacted thesis

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