INSTALLING AND UNSETTLING IMAGINARIES;

Rehearsing the social within the self

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Abstract

The practice-led research outlined here explores ways of bringing attention to the mutual contingency of the self and the social through self-portraiture, culminating in a large multichannel projection and sound installation titled *How to Deal with Difference* (2018). In this thesis I discuss some of the formative influences on this work from various threads of social theory and contemporary installation practice.

What we recognise as ourselves is deeply embedded in the social institutions we exist within. Drawing on Cornelius Castoriadis and others, I will use the term 'imaginary' as an articulation of the social constructions that both form and are formed by the individual. I also refer to the artworks created through this research as 'imaginaries', and through their installation have attempted to unsettle the solidity of various perceptions of the self, and the social.

My studio practice is situated through analysis of related works by prominent contemporary artists, noting some of the similarities and differences to the approach I have taken. Works by William Kentridge, Camille Henrot, Pipiotti Rist and Lisa Reihana are discussed in some detail, my purpose here being both to acknowledge their influence and to articulate something of what is distinctive in the work I have created.

Partly inspired by Judith Butler's account of performative identity and self-poesis, I filmed myself performing many varying and contradictory 'selves', in an exploration of my own relationality and self-formation. In imagining, performing and arranging these characters, I drew from social imaginaries I am implicitly involved in. By digitally compiling the footage, I composited myself into plural existence to disrupt the sense of singular coherence, although it is obvious that all characters are performed by me. I have positioned the performances as 'rehearsals' – they are not polished or complete, but iterative and partial. By trying on characters I do not think of as me, I seek to explore, through rehearsal, the social within myself. The result is an agonistic portrait of my own socially situated self, which is intended to allow multiple modes of engagement and space for self-reflection.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters except where indicated in the Preface*,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is 11280 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Freya Pitt
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Relationality: the shifting ground beneath our feet

This research is motivated in part by an attempt to come to grips with my own relationality.¹ I have always been uncomfortable making direct assertions within my work unless it also contains a contradictory one, and have come to understand this impulse as my agonized need to address the sociality that defines me. Working within moving image and installation practice, the project is also framed by broad fields of social theory where ideas of self-ness, sociality and alterity have intersected in various ways. Since the middle of the 20th Century, contestation on grounds of gender, race and class has opened up a reshaping of social structures. Yet the histories of oppression are deeply embedded. My work attempts to address this historical inflexion by investigating how the construction of the self and the social is cast through the time² and space³ of art installations (drawing on theorists Cornelius Castoriadis, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze and Claire Bishop amongst others).⁴

Through this body of work I have developed the idea of rehearsing the social through the self, asking how self-portraits can articulate the myriad relations that we both form and are formed by. By engaging with the work of William Kentridge, Pipilotti Rist, Camille Henrot and Lisa Reihana, I will explore ideas of multiplicity and relationality in portraiture through the forms of situated objects and moving image.

The self-portraits developed throughout the research use a range of media from projection, digital screens and speakers, found and sculptural objects. I am bundling the spatial arrangements of these elements under the term ‘installation art’, working from art theorist Claire Bishop’s assertion that the medium...

... creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality... Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision."⁵

From this I will be drawing out the terms of bodily engagement with the work over time and space as well as the idea of a constructed totality (made of multiple elements).

¹ In my usage of the term ‘relationality’ I am referring to the idea that as a being, we exist amongst, or in spatial, temporal and psychic relation to other things. These relations will sometimes be mutually constitutive (though to wildly differing degrees.)
² As the dimension that allows for the constitution of the self as subject.
³ As the dimension of the social.
⁴ These theorists have given context and direction to my own thinking, and in this thesis I try to give some expression to how I have found engagement with this work fruitful for my artistic practice. Obviously I do not have scope here to engage in depth with the details of these theories, or discuss how they differ from alternative modes of thinking about such matters.
⁵ Claire Bishop. Installation Art; a critical history (London : Tate, 2005), 6.
As the title of this thesis suggests, my project involves the installation and unsettling of ‘imaginaries’. My use of this term draws on the work of social theorist Cornelius Castoriadis, who uses it to refer to the social structures and institutions that make up any society. Castoriadis formulated this concept while interrogating the role of imagination in creation – in the sense that for a social institution to come into being it must first be, or have been imagined. I am using the term as an articulation of the social that both forms and is formed by the individual, and I am also framing the artworks created throughout this research as 'imaginaries', as constructions of the social. Composed from multiple elements, the works will offer shifting - often conflicting - perspectives. Through the act of imagining, performing and ‘making’ these perspectives, I will be simultaneously drawing from and into the social imaginaries that I am implicitly involved in. I am an untrained, unpolished performer. The characters performed are not whole, but rather fragments related to certain topics or ideas. My depiction of them is an attempt to explore my own lack (or locality) of understanding on global issues and the experience of other space-times. Nevertheless, my work here is not primarily an endeavour to deeply understand others, as there are surely more effective ways to do this. I am, rather, imaginatively reaching into the space between myself and the social. This work is an endeavour to catalyse reflection on the radical instability and multifariousness of our reciprocally constructed imaginaries.

The created imaginaries can be seen as a form of spatialised self-portraits. I have approached the social through myself from an understanding that active self-engagement, or self-poietics

is a possibility whereby the self is dispossessed of its sovereign position through opening a relation to alterity. If we make, unmake, and remake ourselves, such makings only occur with and through others. Our self-poietics take place within a horizon of regulatory ideals that determine who can and cannot be an intelligible self. So it is with others that we assume and, at the same time, potentially dismantle the norms that threaten to render us either unrecognizable or too recognizable.

Throughout this project I have remade myself in many different forms. Whether it be footage of me performing in various costumes, recorded readings, or in the object-

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6 See Castoriadis (1987). While it is beyond the scope of this project to offer a detailed analysis of Castoriadis’s usage of the ‘imaginary’, I will mention that contrary to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s use of the term to refer to the specular, or image as representation, Castoriadis uses the term to refer to that which we make images of; a structure of social relations that we make significations within. For another prominent articulation of the idea see Charles Taylor’s account of the development of differences through imaginaries in Taylor (2004).

7 For instance; How to deal with difference, the valencies within ‘hospitality’, or what it means to perform an emotion I have not experienced.

8 Butler, 2013, 55.
ified form of incomplete body casts,⁹ the works are an arrangement of me through space. To create a self-portrait requires recognition of self. What is recognisable is in large part governed by social norms, established and internalised through our interactions within imaginaries. The complexity of these imaginaries mean they are full of contradictions, which we are often not aware of because of their internalisation.¹⁰ Among others, I will be drawing on self-portraits by artists William Kentridge and Pipilotti Rist, who present themselves as complicated, faceted beings. Kentridge often includes more than one portrayal of himself, teasing out some form of internal contradiction. Looking to Camille Henrot, Julian Rosefeldt and Lisa Reihana I will be stretching the idea of self-portrait to be inclusive of the social imaginaries that give interpretable meaning to selves.¹¹ Or, otherwise stated, I try to bring into the foreground some of the background contexts that shape the selves we operate amongst.

We are defined by social relationships, and one of the central themes of my project is the need to pay more attention to our co-contingency. This is a hard task made harder given we cannot get out of ourselves. We may be able to empathise, but no ‘true’ understanding of another can be achieved. As Karl Marx stated, “The reciprocal and all sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection.”¹² This indifference despite dependence seems an important antagonism within social relationships.¹³ Within my installations I am framing the viewer as an unknown element of the social that delineates my own a[nta]gonised sense of self. For the sake of the project let’s call my unchanging response to them an extreme version of indifference.

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⁹ In the early work Imagine you were falling plaster cast sections of my body hold up, grasp and encase a screen, light and lo-fi projection device, playing with the idea that we always engage with the world through our body. See appendices (A) for documentation and description.

¹⁰ Taking Galileo as a subject Oh Galileo, My Galileo explored the way internalised contradictions effect the imaginary and vice versa. See appendices (B).

¹¹ While depicting myself, the works made throughout this research all implicate the viewer. Where some the works address them through text or spoken word terms such as ‘you’, in others lights, mirrors and played-back recordings expose the viewer’s presence within the installations, while a few are more directly participatory, using responsive technology so the viewer’s presence triggers a change in the installation. An early work that addressed the antagonism present in so called ‘interactive’ works was Sitting Antagonism; see appendices (C). In a post-Barthes world where the monolithic ‘viewer’ probably ought to be dead, how to address the unknown viewers that the works are implicating has been an ongoing problematic within the research. Instead of focussing on the viewer as other I am positioning the viewer as myself: me viewing portraits of me.

¹² Marx, Grundrisse. (London : Penguin Harmondsworth 1993), 157. An indifference that the capitalist mode of production has exploited to converse aims and great effect, terming us individual and free, rather than socially engaged and mutually contingent.

¹³ A similar antagonism is outlined by Jacques Derrida when he suggests ‘hospitality’ is a sort of paradoxical beckoning, where the stranger is only welcomed inasmuch as there are limitations on that welcome. This became the premise for the work Freynation. See appendices (D).
Along with assembled objects as a spatial mapping of relationality, I am using moving image and audio to interrupt the spatial dimension with the temporal. Where cinema has a history rooted in drawing a social (a group of movie-goers) into a subject (such as a character’s journey), my project is more interested in drawing out the social aspects (relationality) of a subject (me). Sitting in video art and animation, most of the moving image work in this project involves green-screened footage of myself ‘performing’ before being given constructed relationalities through digital animation/assemblage. In 1972 John Berger seemed to mistrust the propagandist tendencies of moving image, arguing that “In a film the way one image follows another, their succession, constructs an argument which becomes irreversible.” More recently, Berger has talked of the necessary potential in using narrative as a ‘way to break the unilinear flow of time, making the inconsequentiality of unheeded protests’ meaningless. I imagine in ‘72 it may have seemed possible to hold fast against the structured flow of images (artificial in the sense that it occurs outside our perception). 50 years later, we live in a tsunami of constructed narratives, with little to no stationary elements and arguments constantly reversed. I am working with both the construction that successive images allow and their allowance for simultaneity.

Judith Butler’s concept of performative identity has also informed the research in practice and theory. Conceived in relation to sexed bodies Butler posits that

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.

My works are built around the idea that the bodily act of performance is both formed by and forms the social constructions I am engaged in. In allowing for transformation, the individual’s agency within the imaginary is realised in these acts. It is a slight, small agency, but can perhaps expand my own sense of what I recognise as myself.

Throughout years of working with shadow and projection, the moments when my own shadow suddenly catches my eye, caught and unexpectedly involved in what is happening on the screen, have jolted me out of my everyday sense of self and forced a reassessment of my relation to everything around me. And this moment has often felt surprisingly visceral. My thinking about these interruptions came into sharp

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focus after reading Maree Pardy’s thoughts on cosmopolitanism. While sitting in Footscray Mall, she wrote “Perhaps it calls neither for Kantian perpetual peace,17 nor an emphasis on engagement with the other per se, but more for an engagement with the constant transformation of place and self as we encounter difference and otherness.”18 So to deal with difference we need to encounter it. And this is the space that a lot of socially engaged practice works in, where the relationships built up between participants is the main content of the ‘artwork’. But this need that Pardy brings up - to go beyond the ‘interaction per se’ and into an introspective space where you engage with difference through your own shifting relationality was something that I wanted to explore. I felt this shifting within these private moments between my shadow and I, where I contemplated my own contingency. There were no direct interpersonal relationships formed; yet this introspective space gave me a freedom to engage through thinking, by rehearsing the social.

Puzzling over what made the experience of my shadow feel social – one factor seemed to be the sense of being caught in space – the light source and screen giving a visceral aesthetic to my physical relationality. Geographer Doreen Massey suggests where time is

...the dimension of succession – then space is the dimension of things being, or existing at the same time; of simultaneity... What that means is that space is the dimension that presents us with the existence of the other... the question of the social. And it presents us with the most fundamental of political questions, which is how are we going to live together? 19

The dimension of space brings into relief the sense that we are a singular amongst a collective. Coming to terms with this involves holding the general and the particular at once. To see the question of how to live together posed by space requires a pulling in and out of different scales. A particular question (how will we live together) in general space (everywhere, all space). When we wholly inhabit ourselves we are caught up in our own particularity, which leaves little space for the particularity of others. Instead we cast them as a general; as that beyond our ken. On entering the space of an art installation, we are made aware of our body in relation to things that are not our body. We may not immediately understand, or ken them, but are allowed to inspect them, to think through our relationship without the need to immediately react.

17 I should briefly point out that this implication of the inadequacy of Kant’s moral framework is a contested area and plays into Pauline Kleingeld’s argument that not enough attention is paid to his radical shift in views on racial equality. See Kleingeld (2014).
This idea that Massey outlines, that the dimension of space exposes our sociality, was at the heart of the early work You, Me and the Bittersweet, which worked to bring out the latent dimensionality Anne Carson read into a fragment of Sappho’s poetry. See appendices (E).
As a child who took daydreaming seriously, I spent hours pouring over Mitsumasa Anno’s illustrations of various social scenes. A village, a farm, or my favourite, a marketplace. I would start by picking a character from the scene, and then construct a world for them out of the image – picking homes, stalls, lovers, children etc. I was of course making assumptions based on signifiers Anno had drawn into the image, but also interpreting, or imagining relationships through myself; my own understanding of what the butcher would be like. Gilles Deleuze talks of the solitude of existing, or becoming.20

But it is an extremely populous solitude. Populated not with dreams, phantasms or plans, but with encounters... It is from the depth of this solitude that you can make any encounter whatsoever. You encounter people (and sometimes without knowing them or ever having seen them) but also movements, ideas, events, entities.21

This brings forth the implicit sociality that defines us; the way we make ontological sense of the world through others. I don’t eat meat, so I never interact with the butcher, but we are still in relation. This is where I am framing the concept of rehearsing the social within the self. I am of course in no way arguing that we all do away with bodily encounters and wholly rely on those internally imagined. However, to bring back Pardy, perhaps alongside “engagement with the other per se” we each need to put time towards “engaging with the constant transformation of place and self”. Through this kind of self-reflexive engagement, we can work with the indifference that lies between us, rather than trying to make it disappear.22 While within the works this could be explored through the viewer, in framing them as self-portraits this research focuses on interrogating the artist’s sociality.23 I try to give some energy and shape to the idea that rehearsing encounters is a valuable activity, and a way of navigating towards the unsettling of imaginaries.

20 See Deleuze (2007) and Deleuze. Guattari (1987) for the usage of the term ‘becoming’ as a verb without necessity of a defined eventuality.
22 Perhaps the contemporary obsession with ‘selfies’ can be worked with to reach a more nuanced view of the social as a shifting network mediated through ourselves.
23 For the sake of scale and clarity this research is focussed on human sociality, but I do see them as contingent on far greater networks made up of that which is ‘more than human’. 

“Thinking thought usually amounts to withdrawing into a dimensionless place in which the idea of thought alone persists. But thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized.”

This chapter will look at sociality and how it can be understood. That we are all relative to one another is fairly straightforward logic. Following that, we must all exist somewhere. In an environment. Continuing logically, we exist on the Earth, in the cosmos. This is a deeply unsatisfying answer though, because it doesn’t take into account the matter of all those relationships between us. Through the work of Camile Herot, William Kentridge and Lisa Reihana we can see some ways that these relationships build a complex world that cannot be reduced to ‘the Earth’. As a framework for thinking about these complex constructions, I will be starting from Cornelius Castoriadis’s conception of the imaginary.

Frustrated at the totalitarianism he saw as inherent in other ideologies (including Marxism and Leninism), Castoriadis began theorising on the role of imagination in the creation of societies. Through the human ability to imagine, a degree of individual autonomy is posited within social institutions. In the 1970 text *The Imaginary Institution of Society* Castoriadis argues that society is made up of institutions (for example, Catholicism), which can be read through their signifiers (such as The Garden of Eden). These institutions go forth and institute, shaping all manner of social relations. Any conglomerates of signifiers that become an institution must first have been imagined. Out of all the extraordinary gardens on this earth none can be accepted as the ‘true’ Garden of Eden. Yet, women still fall from it. Yet, paintings have been made of it. It exists; it becomes instituted through being imagined, and by continuing to be re-imagined.

French artist Camille Henrot’s video work *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) was created on a residency at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. Starting with a computer screen showing the default ‘mac’ universe background, a voice intones various endings to the phrase ‘In the beginning...’ These multiple beginnings are drawn from various creation myths, and in the collaging of them, the narration runs and leaps across ages and locations. Browser windows displaying videos pop up on the desktop, overlaying and underlying each other. Created during a residency at the Smithsonian, the video content is a dizzying array of specimens, office workers and

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Internet content. Henrot has called it “an experience of density”. A hand with painted black and white nails rolls an orange across a yellow surface, with the shattered glass in the window behind. A book opens in two windows, one sitting on top of the other. Their pages are turned in opposite directions. There is a low, mechanical thrum, with an electronic beat running across the top. The pace is fast, with windows rushing up and out, punctuated by the beat. Everything is being ‘presented’. Humanity, our stories and endeavours are in a process of becoming through collision and displacement. Disparate elements are displayed in relation, but they do not meld.

The Smithsonian calls itself an Institution, a term that denotes a social structure that regulates individual behaviours within its surrounding community. Self-proclaimed as the ‘world’s largest museum’ their collection spans an astonishing breadth of artifacts and research pertaining to all corners of the earth. One of its research projects is titled the Encyclopedia of Life (EOL). This language suggests an unbiased reasonable collection. Yet of course, this institution does not exist in a vacuum, but was imagined within a specific environment of entangled relations. Like most museums, the ownership of many of its artifacts is the result of various colonial projects. These signifiers are not seen in the context that made them, but brought to a new world, placed in different relations. The enormous imaginings, the number of signifiers and institutions involved in this reorganisation is brought to the fore in Grosse Fatigue.

There is a bombastic quality in the universalisation in play in Grosse Fatigue. As images and myths splinter and zoom in and out the work is undeniably antagonising its own attempts to be whole. However, in syncing the visuals and sound and holding them within the frame of a single screen, the experience cannot help but be totalising. Yet the generalisation of colliding creation stories is always pinned against the precision of specular images. On the slippery relationship between the particular and the general, Henrot has talked of the relentless desire to go beyond any whole that one can lay out. This seems relevant to a work that was made at the Smithsonian. Grosse Fatigue could be read as a critique of the institutional attempt to capture and organise every bit of knowledge it can. As such the work points to the impossibility of a complete or stationary imaginary.

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26 The pages show a journal entry titled George Condo; Germany to NYC.
27 “About the Smithsonian,” Smithsonian, accessed 5 October, 2018, https://www.si.edu/about
Fig. 1, 2 & 3. Camile Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013.
Henrot has not reimagined the subjects of her videos, rather by reorganising them she is reimagining the institutions made by their relation. The act of imagining is hard to make sense of. Castoriadis sees an overlap with the idea of creation, which he posits as occurring ex nihilo. This is a challenging idea. Western logic dictates that everything comes from something. Yet, in this formulation while things are created from pre-existing elements, what is made is irreducible to the original materials. It is new. Newness arises in the space made when humans disassociate with some part of the assumed. When we do or think something that is not just a repeat of what we have done or thought before, we momentarily open ourselves up to chaos. Inevitably, something articulates in the way that thoughts, lines, forms do. In becoming, they eschew all other possibilities for that particular being at that particular time. There is violence in this dissociation, but as it is the violence of existing it is hard to condemn. And through this generative mechanism, humans have some agency to change the institutions they exist within.

The work feels embodied, like a finely choreographed dance. Each browser window is a world, an individual, a self, with the screen a projected totality. Each world is reduced to a single representation, mediated by hands with variously painted nails - visibly turning pages or opening drawers, invisibly opening up browser tabs on the screen. This is a presentation, a performance – many performances, collated, folded together. And in the folding, new and unexpected intimacies are created by its choreographer, Henrot.

Stating that the work needs to be shown in a space she has constructed Henrot makes clear that Grosse Fatigue is not just a moving image work, but meant to be bodily experienced. My research takes the body as a mechanism for ontological exploration. The unsettling of the imaginary is attempted through actively performing identities. This becomes functional if the signifiers (that make up the imaginary) are understood as not purely conceptual, but rather learnt through deeply embedded, embodied histories. This follows from Butler’s use of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s formulation that the body is an ‘active historical situation’. From this perspective, the way we physically engage with the world is an extension of the complex social relations that our body came to exist and evolve within. In Grosse Fatigue Henrot seems to be antagonising this proposition; by presenting a digital, bodiless world she exposes my need to physically engage with the world in order to understand it.

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29 Latin for ‘out of nothing’. See Klooger (2011) for a more detailed framing of Castoriadis’s use of the term and its contrast to the more classical interpretation by Greek Philosopher Parmenides.

30 For Castoriadis, this is never an entirely ‘individual’ agency though, as we exist socially. See (Castoriadis, 1987, 69).


Another artwork exploring individual agency within an imaginary is William Kentridge’s The Refusal of Time, a moving image, sound and sculpture installation. An imagined exploration of the time that led to Einstein’s discovery of relativity, the work can be read as an attempt to understand the place of the individual within the development of social imaginaries. Where Henrot was layering moving image and mythology, Kentridge’s organisation is more material, performing a rearrangement of physical elements in space.

In the centre of a room is a wooden sculpture that moves in and out with an accordion-like movement. Around this engine or breathing machine, metronomes and clocks tick, voices count; image sequences are run forwards then backwards. Five projections are cast on the walls of the room. Rather than neat projection surfaces, the walls have variously shaped panels leaning on and standing in front of them. As you get closer their linear coherence begins to disassemble, which Kentridge talks of as suggestive of fragmentation, and in some senses embodies Deleuze’s notion of ‘assemblage’. Within the projections a broad range of techniques make up the moving imagery. Animations out of progressive charcoal drawings or shifting pieces of ripped paper draw attention to the illusory quality of film, while farcical scenes in black and white footage reference the beginnings of cinema. Books become landscapes, notes are written, and shadow and silhouette processions hark back to Plato’s cave. The scenes played out do not make up a grand narrative, but rather non-linear moments within constantly shifting relationships. The viewers stand in the space between the breathing machine and the social extrapolations replayed in the videos surrounding them. This could lead to a sense of being simultaneously internal and external, yet any directionality is interrupted through the chaotic nature of the work. With sound and video coming from all angles simply ‘in the midst’, viewers are caught in a becoming that is happening all around them.

Alongside a cast of six others, Kentridge performs within the filmed scenes. He repeats, backtracks and starts again. He is multiplied, offset. Yet it does not feel like a work about him, but rather the actions that he is performing. The act of movement, of being a body in an enormous, shifting environment. The movement of the body delineates its more obvious relationships. The layered visual signifiers suggest further complexities. In one projected scene, footage of Kentridge carrying South African dancer and choreographer Dada Masilo on his back is looped. In another he acts as a scientist, performing measurements on Masilo who is dressed as a spherical Earth. His character is not named as Einstein or Galileo, but the many signifiers of experimenting on time, form and mass cannot help but bring them to

34 Deleuze’s conception that any ‘thing’ is assembled out of smaller elements is explained and expanded on in the following chapter.
my mind – a consequence of having been brought up within narratives and institutions built around the genius of Einstein and Galileo.

Fig. 4. William Kentridge, *The Refusal of Time*, 2012.

Fig. 5. William Kentridge, *The Refusal of Time*, 2012.
Fig. 6, 7 & 8. William Kentridge, *The Refusal of Time*, 2012.
Masilo’s agility, the darkness of her skin and the femininity of her body, unavoidably act as counterpoints to Kentridge’s rather stolid white maleness. Having built a practice that combines her classical ballet training with African dance moves, Masilo has experience in working with the embodied complexities of race relations within any South African imaginary. Kentridge has talked of the “complicity of responsibility” 35 and the “impossibility of finding a clean position”36 in the impact of South African apartheid on his practice. The sections where Masilo and Kentridge are paired within the work speak to this complicity, to the relational contingency within social systems. As such the installations are not ‘clean’ but active, a place where institutions rise and fall; are imagined and re-imagined.

Both Grose Fatigue and The Refusal of Time approach the sedimentation of human exploration as a kind of ontology for the installations. While I have not been working with a museum’s archive or Einstein’s relativity equations, my research has focussed on a similar will towards movement; using the act of imaginative reorganisation to affirm sociality as a condition of existence. Henrot’s and Kentridge’s works span the particular and general in interesting and often uncomfortable ways. In the attempt to articulate something too big to grasp there is an inherently presumptuous undertone. The more the work tries to encompass, the more assumptions, generalisations it will hold. I certainly feel this tension in my own work. For the very reasons that one needs to be wary of this kind of uncomfortable problematising I think it can go a way towards unsettling imaginaries.

Kentridge and Henrot reflexively grapple with imaginaries within which the generalisations tend to fall in their favour.37 Giving voice to the heavy history of imposing social institutions from one imaginary into another, is Lisa Reihana’s in Pursuit of Venus [infected]. While this colonisation of the imaginary happens under uneven power relations, as institutions collide it is not a simple transposing of one on to the other. Reihana’s work suggests undercurrents of subversion in resignification. Within the projection installation a variety of characters co-exist within the background of a neoclassical wallpaper (1804) by Joseph Dufour. On seeing the original wallpaper, which broadly depicts the European colonisation of the pacific, Reihana, (of Maori descent) could not identify with (or in Butlers terms, recognise) the portrayals of native Pacificans. In response, her work In Pursuit of Venus [infected] recreates the wallpaper design as a digital projection installation, now peopled with footage of indigenous New Zealanders and Australians alongside English and French colonisers re-enacting their actions on pacific lands.

36 Ibid
37 Of course, this is a generalisation in itself – but one I am willing to own.
The work has had multiple iterations, and I will be referring to the installation at the 2017 Venice Biennale, where the 32-minute projection was installed along an 8m stretch of wall. The landscape slowly scrolls past the viewers. The soundscape is nuanced, gently pulling in and out of different scenes.

The filmed inhabitants seem to be in their own worlds, barely engaging in others’ narratives. A group of Maori women sit in a circle weaving, while farther along one comforts a crying child. Two European men discuss found artefacts with a diffident interest. An Englishman demonstrates a telescope to two Maori in traditional dress next to a younger pair exploring different ways of wearing a vest. Amongst a group of colonists two Maori perform a ritual on one of their party lying on the ground. In the distance a European man paints en plein air. There are traditional dances, meetings, greetings, gifting and exchanges. Individuals are not becoming together, yet they are contingent on one another. Each character is in action. These actions have immediacy for the present moment, and could be called ‘local’. Being from the future, we know what the culmination of these local acts was within the larger historical scheme. Yet by holding a plurality of local moments in a sort of stasis, in Pursuit of Venus unsettles any clear narrative of the colonial project.

This is not a work with a straightforward message. We see fear and interest on both sides of the encounters between indigenous peoples and colonists, yet the fear is not pronounced. Indeed, there is little emotion portrayed by the actors. There is always the suggestion of violence, but the blood and gore of atrocities committed by the European colonists is not shown. It is a complex portrayal of characters existing within a plurality or concurrency of a ‘present’. The performers gaze pronounces them present(ing). Reihana has stated that the performers are an “embodiment of their ancestors” and that the performance enables them to “return the gaze” in this sense they are performing a re-colonisation, or a de-colonisation of the wallpaper. Yet if these actors are imagining their ancestors’ experience, it is a very calm colonisation. Their movement is slow and graceful, maintaining the sense of a utopic wallpaper scene. Reihana takes the original heavily edited and aestheticised depiction of colonisation and problematises it with representations of those dispossessed by the colonial project; yet she keeps the work existing within the utopic aestheticisation of the original design. This is an intriguing choice, which helps to make the work unsettling. The characters have been changed, but the narrative seems similar, suggesting the deeply embedded nature of norms that facilitate and ultimately constitute colonialism. To unsettle these norms is possible, but actually shifting them is a mammoth task. Instead of denying the colonial imaginary that cannot help but erase the purpose of her own history, in veiling her critical intent, Reihana goes some way towards unsettling the settler-colonial world.

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39 Ibid
Fig. 9. Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2017.

Fig. 10. Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2017.

Fig. 11. Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2017.
In *Grosse Fatigue* Henrot is almost god-like in her powers of reorganisation. While the density suggests the impossibility of singularity, the work runs off the power of its creator's imagination, which cannot help but suggest her agency. This unsettles the institutions of The Smithsonian, of Western Science and Reason, of the Internet and Globalisation. *The Refusal of Time* takes a different approach, creating an imaginary world around what is often viewed as a singular event (Einstein’s discovery of relativity). Kentridge works amongst a cast, establishing individual agency as contingent on and born out of the social, unsettling the institutions of Western science and the power of individual genius. While not making any specific statements on race or gender, he invites the complexity of these institutions into the work. By performing the dynamic power relations between himself and his cast he embeds *The Refusal of Time* within the social imaginary that brought it forth. *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* takes another route altogether. While the work is overtly about colonialism, the institution most unsettled is a grand narrative with Europeans as the primary actors. Indeed, there is no clear individual agency within the work. The artist’s hand is hidden behind Joseph Dufour’s and the cast of performers. The performers do not seem like agents as much as performers – staged, performing within the norms of the wallpaper. Rather than enacting her own imaginary, perhaps Reihana is giving the viewers the materials to reimagine from. Yet I keep wanting a moment of ferocity; something to interrupt the smooth beauty of scene. After all, in unsettling we do not want to institute some rigid new set of norms, or conversely give in to the nihilistic desire for no norms, no understanding at all. Perhaps

I take this to mean being unsettled in oneself as a way of remaining open to alterity. We are each dependant on the social, but it is made out of complex selves, which we can only ever partially recognise. To embrace this partiality necessitates a self-reflexivity – a constant pulling back from assumptions. My research addresses this by drawing the social through myself, requiring both implicit and explicit reflexivity.

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40 Butler, 2013, 97.
41 I am stating this from within a Western imaginary. Edouard Glissant suggests that in his homeland of Martinique an acceptance of opacity (which I am relating to Butler’s notion of partiality) is already a part of the social imaginary; grown out of the colonial dispossession and imposed slavery of his people. See Glissant, 1997.
The self and the social

A self-portrait relies on recognition of the self. The easiest way to think of a self is of its body; it’s physical mass and form. Anything inside my skin is me, anything outside is not me. David, Venus de Milo and The Thinker stand as exquisite representations of the body as self. Their poise and seeming self-preoccupation suggest they exist in and of themselves, not contingent on anything as changeable as mortal thought and fleshy lives. When stones are thrown or arms ripped right off them, their stony expressions do not shift. These are not precarious bodies, but solid as the toned abdominal muscles they display. They exist. They are recognisable in form alone. We do not need them and they do not need us. But we living bodies cannot be so reductive in our self-definition. Of course we are more than our physical body mass, but the nuances of our makeup are less obvious. In this chapter I will use the thinking of Butler and Deleuze, and the moving image works of Pipilotti Rist, William Kentridge and Julian Rosefeldt, to explore organising principles other than what is inside or outside one's skin.

The idea of self is meaningless without the idea of a social. And this contingency is not just semantic. It is the base matter of social construction. We are so busy being ourselves that we forget that we can only be ourselves in relation to others. As Judith Butler argues

If we accept that part of what a body is, and this is for me an ontological claim, part of what a body is, is its dependence on other bodies and networks of support, then we’re suggesting that it’s not altogether right to conceive of individual bodies as completely distinct from one another. Of course, neither are they blended into some amorphous social body[...] It is not just that this or that body is bound up in a network of relations, but that the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible. If we think about the boundary of the body, we might understand it to contain us - but the boundary of the body is also the skin that exposes us to touch, that exposes us to visibility, to audibility, it articulates us as a social creature, not just as an individual.42

This is a nuanced description of the way we understand our world in a bodily sense through our dependency on others. The edges of a body are suggestive of this social contingency - whether someone is cowed, is aggressive, is welcoming. This contingency is explored in Pipilotti Rist’s 1994 video installation work Selbstlos im Lavabad (Selfless in the Bath of Lava). On a tiny screen embedded in the gallery floor Rist stands naked in front of exploding lava, pleadingly gesticulating upwards. Through exclamations of “I am a worm and you are a flower. You made everything

better” she hails the viewer in Italian, Swiss and French. Where the other works discussed in this paper are easily read as or within far reaching social imaginaries, this work is less evidently social. It creates a direct relationship with the viewer. It is implied that her current residence in Hell is your fault. She is titled selfless, as if only existing through you, the viewer. In Butler’s terms, she is begging you to give her definition. All we see is her body, Rist’s self(less)-portrait, but it is more about the pull between that body and you. You are the one with the power to recognise and define, yet you are also the one who comes away unsettled by the tiny lady, unsure how to ‘make things better’.

We are each made up of elements that extend beyond our physical body. These elements exist in relation to each other, but also everything else. Which is so many things, such huge and multi-dimensional sociality it’s impossible to comprehend. Thinking about the self like this is almost impenetrable. If you are defined by your relation to everything, where do you draw the line between the things that are you and the things that are not you? As Butler says, we are neither ‘completely distinct’ or subsumed by the melting pot.

In Deleuze and Guattarian terms, a person could be called an assemblage, a collection of elements that are cohesive enough to call a thing. An assemblage is not just defined by the elements that make it up though, but rather by their ‘lines of flight’. These flight lines refer to the constant potentiality of things that are always on a trajectory – something that can be articulated through these philosophers’ conception of the molecular and the molar. An assemblage has a molecular level (where the smaller parts could break apart given the right conditions) as well as its

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44 See Deleuze and Guattari A Thousand Plateaus, 1980.
molar level (where these parts are stable enough to be seen as a whole, in some way discrete from everything else). So a self-assemblage on a molar level could be a physical body (legs, lungs, etc covered in skin), a grandma, a fascist, an artist. On a molecular level the same assemblage could be about to shed some skin, could encounter information that draws them into internal conflict, into feeling sympathy for a previously dismissed or despised minority, or to stop making art. If my self-assemblage is defined by the lines of flight of my molecular movement, where nuclei are always decaying, I am not a ‘thing’, but a ‘becoming thing’. This idea of becoming, of action in the formation of the self, can be read alongside the performative. Identities are not set, finite rules, rather expressions that we are enacting, changeable but true/experienced for the present moment and the product of social relations. The performance is both manifestation and construction of a self that is defined by the social.

In his work Drawing Lesson 47 (an interview with the Artist) (2010), William Kentridge enters from both sides of a desk and sits, each version of himself respectively bouncing on the chair to get comfortable. Kentridge-the-interviewer asks Kentridge-the-artist to describe his life as an artist, but keeps cutting him off with further developments of the question. After a while the artist gives up waiting for the question to end and begins answering over the top of the interviewer. The characters are at cross purposes, determined to misunderstand one another, with the interviewer frequently covering the artist’s microphone and soliloquizing to camera about the drudgery of the artist. They each take themselves painfully seriously, are wearing the same clothes, and have many of the same mannerisms.

Fig. 13. William Kentridge, Drawing Lesson 47, 2010.
I doubt William Kentridge is solely either of the two selves he is performing, but together, they articulate an assemblage. In these broad strokes he is exposing some lines of flight, portraying an attempt to work through decay and growth in a molecular sense - to become. In *Drawing Lesson 47* the artist performs himself with a mix of poetics and farce to build up internal contradictions. These are never purely internal, of course, but largely learnt from the outside in. Each character sounds silly in relation to the other. Kentridge often works with humour and self-irony and has termed them “ways of acknowledging the futility of the self-aggrandisement of certainty”. I would argue that humour is also a way of feeling out vulnerability, the ways that we are not stable or singular, but made up of elements whose arrangement is dependent on others.

So, I as a human/assemblage am not just social, (in relation to everything) but social practice (in relation to everything in action, in mutual becoming and constitution). I think it is important to note the magnitude of this shifting relationality. Important because it is easy to ignore the many concurrent levels of molecular activity within a molar assemblage such as neo-capitalism, where the flows of transformative energy happen in obvious ways, but also on levels that are out of sight and easy to forget. Important because it is such hard work to sustain thinking of the self like this that most of us don’t.

In Julian Rosefeldt’s *Manifesto*, actor Cate Blanchett performs 13 roles, with the texts all drawn from a collaging of artists manifestos, from Marx and Engels to Wyndham Lewis to John Reed to Claes Oldenberg. For the work’s launch at Australian Centre for the Moving Image, the scenes were projected simultaneously on 13 screens suspended within a large space. On entering the installation the work is both overwhelming and seductive. I was first aware of the cacophony, both aural and visual, but it didn’t take long before being drawn in by Blanchett’s performances. A homeless man, a newsreader, a choreographer, a grunge rocker. The characters are perfectly made up, exquisitely portrayed. Set within Rosefeldt’s immaculate and grandiose cinematography, the scenes become a sensual experience of irony and aesthetics alongside Blanchett’s incredible cheekbones.

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46 Which may be why Maree Pardy sat in a mall, trying to think of ways to think of ourselves in relation to other selves that could change the potentialities direction. That could change social imaginaries and the life of selves within.

Fig. 15. Julian Rosefeldt, *Manifesto*, 2015.
The work is spectacular, but within the frame of this research Blanchett is perhaps too good an actor. It feels like trickery, illusion. Like she is not trying on these characters, but inhabiting them. Not becoming these characters but is them. Which begs the question, who is this work a portrait of? Each iteration is so utterly engaging it is a battle to withdraw from any enough to take in the plurality or sociality that underlies them.

Where Kentridge’s sketchlike bumbling portrays him as embedded in a difficult and evolving sociality, Blanchett’s characters appear singular, poised, somehow unattached to the histories they explicitly reference. Kentridge’s characters are bumbling because they are working things out as they go along, a process of hesitant self-emergence and construction rather than re-iterative performance of established selves/routines. This brings me to the term ‘rehearsing’. Rehearsals are primarily for yourself, an exploration not a depiction. A time when you are trying things out, seeing how things work. This is the valence I want to bring to Butler’s ideas of performance as a way of actively shifting deeply embedded norms, where we can “start to performatively displace and reconfigure the contours of what matters, appears, and can be assumed as one’s own intelligible presence.”47 By rehearsing the performance of ourselves in relation to the norms that have shaped us, we can unsettle these relationships and begin to imagine new ones. But to not institute these new relationships as norms we must keep re-making ourselves. While working with footage of myself performing means there is a specular-ly definitive endpoint, in this research I am positioning (and embodying) the performances as rehearsals – they are not polished or complete but iterative and partial; me trying out a scene.

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Installing and Unsettling: A rehearsal

Fig. 16. Freya Pitt, *How to Deal with Difference*, [animation development still]. 2018.

The rehearsals I have undertaken within this research have been an attempt to comprehend the social relationships that define my own sense of self. I have been practicing actions and ideas in an attempt to become more aware, more understanding of my own place in the world. As outlined in previous chapters, I am using the imaginary as a framework for the idea of the social. This structure is articulated as both the social constructions that I have grown up within and my own constructions of the social in the form of artworks. Drawing on Deleuze I have framed myself as an assemblage in action. Pardy and Butler suggest a path towards sociality via active self-engagement. Acting as placeholders I began creating individual voices, which combined could create a cacophony. Largely effected through costume changes, I have imagined and performed characters that expound radically different perspectives. This range in points of view is an attempt to make sense of the varying ideas that give definition to my own. It can only be an incomplete attempt, as the depth of relationality of my body right now would be impossible to capture, not to mention its constantly shifting nature. The process of making the installations has been an active thinking through of my attempt at navigating complexities that are impossible to resolve; yet which, as I have argued, are worth engaging with.
Fig. 17. Freya Pitt, *How to Deal with Difference* [installation development image], 2018.

Fig. 19. Freya Pitt, *How to Deal with Difference* [installation development image], 2018.
An early iteration of the installation *How to Deal with Difference* was presented in VCA’s Artspace in June 2018. It is a self-portrait comprised of five channel video projection, nine channel sound and four large panels of mirrored acetate. Ranging from 4.5m to 1m wide, two videos are projected on the walls and three on hanging screens within the space. You cannot see the work in its entirety from any position within the room. As you walk in the door, the first hanging screen is the smallest. On it, a small reporter welcomes you to this “presentation on How to Deal with Difference”, warning that “you will encounter fears, but afterwards, I guarantee you will fear encounters no more!” The voice, along with some light musak is coming from a small speaker hanging above your head, and as you move away it melds with the voices coming from other parts of the room. The rest of the projections have two speakers hanging above the primary viewing spots. One hangs to the left giving voice to that half of the screen, the other to the right. The first impression is of a cacophony, as a multitude of voices rise and fall within the space.

This clamour is coming from multiple instances of me. Footage of my body, filmed performing different actions before being composited into plural existence. I have populated this world with a colony of myself; performing difference, but undeniably a single subject. It is, after all, a self-portrait. I am trying to perform a *dispossession* of my singularity (the various valences of the term ‘dispossession’ are discussed by Butler and Athanasiou in their book by the same name). The most violent, obvious sense is where an individual or group have the things that define them (land or rights) taken away by others. This is related to but also in some ways implicit in another understanding of the term where it “marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings”, and as such allow an openness to alterity. Within a contemporary Australian imaginary the relatively recent colonial dispossession is very present. My body feels at home amidst the Karri trees and headlands of South West Australia, yet I simultaneously know I should not be on this land given that the massacre of indigenous people is what led to my presence. True and comprehensive reparation is likely impossible, but perhaps a degree of self-dispossession may be apt, by considering ourselves as contingent, and attempting some awareness of the reciprocality of how our selves have come into being.

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48 Mirroring a similar movement within the work, my description will shift between first and third person, acting as an attempt to understand from different perspectives.
49 As this cacophony overtook any individual voices I am trying to lessen this effect for the next iteration of the work.
50 Butler, 2013, 11.
51 This is drawing on activist and sociologist Clare Land who asks fellow non-Indigenous people to ‘perform various kinds of self questioning’ (Land, 2015, 12.) in an action towards decolonization in her 2015 book *Decolonizing Solidarity*. Similarly, while more aimed at Indigenous researchers, Linda Tuhiiwai Smith outlines the specific need for Decolonizing Methodologies within the research community in her 1999 book by the same name.
This dispossession is not an attempt to become a stony, fractured body section like Venus de Milo, but to stumble towards what Butler terms the “various forces that precede and exceed our deliberate and bounded selfhood.”\textsuperscript{52} Butler is here referring to the way we are formed by/within the institutions that make up our social imaginary. Some of these \textit{a priori} relationships are obvious. But most are closer to the subconscious – deeply ingrained and so full of contradictions it is easier to ignore them. I may not be religious, but the fall of Eve has formed me. We are full of contradictions because the number of relations or instituting factors are too many to fit in any cohesive narrative. The works of this research are an attempt to figurise these relationships, and in doing so act out the dispossession that Butler suggests as a mechanism by which one may open up to alterity.

Installation art is well placed to explore the antagonism of being simultaneously discrete and relational, as a single work is made up of situated things in relation to other situated things. In Deleuzian terms the installation \textit{How to Deal with Difference} is an assemblage. An environment and a theme tether the various elements together on a molar level. Yet the variety of screen size and arrangement, and the confusion of voices that make up the soundscape, doesn’t allow a monistic impression. The molecular level could be seen as the different characters in relation but separate. Within and between these characters and their constructed environment, the nuclear growth and decay of contradictions is exposed through the collaging of elements into relation.

I have talked of sociality as a spatio-temporal relation within and between assemblages, or selves. What makes these conceptions of self interesting though, is the moment one becomes consciously aware of something unself - the moment of encounter. You know the other is not you through its difference. Less obvious are the ways you know what you are through your difference to it. Through difference, an edge is articulated. What happens at these edges? Deleuze writes

\begin{quote}
Each encounters the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two, since they have nothing to do with one another, but which is between the two, which has its own direction, a bloc of becoming, an a-parallel evolution.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

We are only aware of being a self through others, yet this impossibility of getting outside ourselves leads to the inherent indifference between selves that Marx saw as our social connection. In an assemblage, there are molecular edges throughout the molar whole. These edges disrupt any centralisation, embedding us in contradictions and giving us a fractural sensibility.

In the assemblage of \textit{How to Deal with Difference} each character you look at seems like they could be the key to understanding what the work is about. When they alone do not elucidate, you move onto the next, only to find the same. They are

\textsuperscript{52} Butler, 2013, 14.
\textsuperscript{53} Deleuze, 2007, 7.
enticing in their commitment to the present moment but will not let you into their whole. Many seem to be reacting to you; asking for things from you. Yet it is hard to grasp what it is they want. On a small suspended screen two figures gaze outwards. They are having a conversation which starts out as Beckett’s Waiting For Godot, then morphs into a constructed ‘Waiting for Difference’. What ‘difference’ they are waiting for is not stipulated.54

It is unclear where characters sit on the spectrum of ‘constructed by the artist explicitly based on encounters she has experienced’ to ‘constructed by the artist drawing from the imaginaries that have shaped her ontological sense’. The characters, or points of view I perform within the work are made and presented by me, but also drawn from the social institutions I am implicitly engaged in. The characters were developed in answer to how difference is dealt with in my social imaginary. The ambiguities within the representations reflect in part what is available to me. The partiality of our understanding of others results in standard tropes, but while playing with these I am never fully settled into them. There is no ‘Il Dotorro’ from Commedia Del Arte, but there is a bad poet in a beret. Individually their simplicity, or lack of dimensionality often makes them appear ridiculous. The hammy acting and bad wigs55 heighten this to a sense of cabaret. I am hoping that in the presentation of art-ifice on art-ifice, something more complicated, less easily articulated - even, god forbid, something honest will be exposed.

To make the videos, I wrote rough scripts or ‘action plans’ for characters. I came up with a great many more scenarios that appear in the final work. Every time I set up for filming I had a longer list of characters than I could manage to embody before I had to leave. I filmed them (myself) in front of a chroma-screen, setting the camera on its tripod and dashing back and forth to press record between takes. The costumes were improvised as I went.56

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54 If you or I are viewing the work, the primary difference at work is that we have lived full lives within physical bodies. We are matter, not pre-recorded, composited light and sound particles. Those instructing on how to deal with, reacting to and polemising on difference are a representation-only colony, created from imagination. Their ‘reactions’ to us, to the sexed, raced, classed viewer have been imagined, yet you and I can imagine. Do imagine. Will imagine again.

55 If these bring to mind Terry Gilliam’s The Adventures of Baron Munchausen then perhaps we had a similar childhood, where it was fine that Robin Williams was the king of the Moon with cerebral head detachable from his filthy, tickle loving body.

56 Out of my oversized collection, which in itself may point to the origins of this project.
In the installation large mirrors lie on the floor, reflecting upwards, while others on the walls reflect across ways. These and the three suspended screens give the sense of floating, or stasis. Caught somewhere or nowhere, stuck in layers of fabulation – bringing to mind Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia where real sites “are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”. This dimensionality within the environment is representative of the interplay between the spatial and the psychical within the social imaginary. Running along the bottom of the three larger scale projections is an undulating body of black ooze, which is a mirrored human form turning around and round, spit-roast style. As you get close your shadow appears within the projection, melding with this black mass of body, as it rotates.

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The background is largely constructed out of old paintings. Imagery that has shaped my sense of the world, of what is beautiful and what is intelligible. The landforms are from Hans Memling’s the *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine*, which seems archipelagic in its headlands, lakes and floating reflections. Having grown up in Albany in Southwest WA a horizon of headlands and islands has a homely nostalgia about it.\(^{58}\) I was drawn to this landscape after reading Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* which he positions (drawing an analogy between Deleuze and Guattari’s theories on rhizomatic thought and the archipelagic nature of the islands of Martinique) as non-hierarchical, allowing for a conception of self that is both open or unbounded, and aware of its scale.\(^{59}\) Behind the landform is looping footage of billowing clouds. While fluffy and white, the movement of the clouds is suggestive of some volcanic force. The scene has an Asiatic aesthetic which initially I thought was accidental, but then wondered if it’s some sublimation of *Monkey Magic*, mostly watched as a stoned teen. There is a unity in the organisation of the characters within the landscape, reminiscent of a garden. Heightening this are the frequent collaged elements taken from Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Through collaged imagery and performed actions *How to Deal with Difference* contains references to well-known histories and events from institutions I have grown up with, resulting in a historically sublimated, over-signified landscape.

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\(^{58}\) See Robert Dale’s 1833 engraving of my hometown on the following page.

\(^{59}\) See Glissant and Wing. 1997, 11.
A sign ‘If you see something say something’ sits on Lucas van Valckenborch’s (1595) tower of babel. A ‘lookout for difference’ standing atop it sets off an alarm on spotting something through binoculars (you?). Argus, the many-eyed giant of Greek mythology falls into the clouds as Narcissus into the lake. An attempt to embody the Vitruvian man falls because my body is different to his.

![Image of a tower with a sign on it](image)

**Fig. 24. Freya Pitt, How to Deal with Difference [animation still of Valckenborch appropriation], 2018.**

There are two notable aesthetic similarities between How to Deal with Difference and Reihana’s work in Pursuit of Venus [infected]. Both are reworking imagery that has shaped our social imaginaries with contemporary footage of multiple figures collaged into this historically sublimated imagery. Within the seemingly endless environments, the groupings of characters each maintain their own little section of it, existing in seeming bubbles. This is potentially due to logistics. To film everyone at once would require an immense stage and to manage the timings between different shoots so that interactions can function is a truly enormous project in itself. So, in both works the individual scenes are collated but separate. Put in relation, but only indifferently relating. And, desired or not, this serves to bring Marx’s conception that our indifference is part of our social connection to the fore.

The focal point of the imagery is a golden pulpit, with columns supporting screens and a pink banner with the text HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENCE; an instructional. There are catholic-esque ornate flourishes, and large screens either side of the pulpit showing close ups of the speakers suggestive of arena gigs or a TED talk. From the pulpit a woman goes through 5 steps to deal with difference. The steps are mostly ridiculous or bureaucratic. Because it would be impossible to seriously come up with 5 steps that would function in all scenarios that one encounters difference. Yet this woman is doing her best. She can’t help falling into irony, but (I am in a position to tell you) she is honestly trying from within her bounds. She invites experts to the stage to talk to their experience. Zeus outlines his disdain for non-gods, a fire fighter goes through the Stop-Drop-and-Roll procedure as a method for dealing with difference, and an uptight lady suggests wiping down all surfaces.
Fig. 26. Robert Dale, *Panoramic View of King George's Sound, Part of the Colony of Swan River*, 1833.

Fig. 27. Freya Pitt, *How to Deal with Difference* [process image of Robert Dale appropriation], 2018.

Fig. 28. Freya Pitt, *How to Deal with Difference* [animation development still], 2018.

Across the way an old lady playing solitaire looks up, sees you, screams, drops her cards everywhere and hides behind her chair. After a while, she gives the ‘difference’ a shady look, gathers the cards and starts the game again. My grandma is not into solitaire (though her sister, my great-aunt, was). As gran, or nagymama, gets older her English gets worse, making it even harder for me to understand the unreasonable impulses of a war-torn émigré wanting a hard-line immigration policy. She married in a refugee camp in Germany after WWII and with her husband migrated to Australia. They had both fled Hungary as they had come from middle

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60 Aged by the costume, fools.
class families, and couldn’t bear the onslaught of communism. So instead, they lived in shacks with dirt floors until they could afford a house in the Perth suburbs. She is one of my favourite people, but also utterly baffling as an individual and a set of social relations that I don’t understand. She is someone who is embedded in any history of me, yet I have not lived hers. A portrait of her hangs in the room I sleep in when I visit. She looks happy and uncomplicated. While this reads as tangential to my thesis, it is an attempt to talk to the deep-seated relationships and contradictions that the research grapples with.

On another screen soldiers move in formation. Each is a repeat of the same footage, suggesting the possibility for a malignant, multiplication based takeover or ‘attack of the clones’. After shooting at the viewer a few times, the soldiers cry in unison ‘why aren’t they dying? Who are you monsters?’ while the General reports to base that ‘It’s like they are not flesh and blood at all, but only photons, projected before our very eyes’. While performing these soldiers, I felt unsure. My ‘liberal views’ are sceptical of the defence forces, but what do I know about war or invasion. The shooting actions are taken from my year 7 school dance classes, where we learnt the steps to late 90’s pop group Steps ‘my boot scootin baby (is drivin’ me crazy)’.

Southeast from the soldiers, someone (spoiler alert; it’s me) gazes at a painting on a plinth. It is The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch, and after a while they turn and deliver a short lecture on it, ending with a quote by Raoul Vaneigem

> What he drew on most deeply was his own chaotic subjectivity, and there he found images of the conflict that goes on making and unmaking our very sense of the human, pushing ‘humanity’ back to its wild beginnings.

The closest I came to church while growing up was my mother’s shelf of Hieronymus Bosch books. I could recognise the signifiers of religious iconography though I didn’t understand the institutions they formed. Yet it all seemed relevant to me. I imagined my parents as the couple flying on the whale (my family spent a lot of time gazing at the sea through binoculars, looking for disruption/whales on the horizon). I wondered at the act, the time spent sketching and dabbing paint to articulate someone inserting a flower into another’s anus, or having an orgy with a large fish. These figures seemed joyful rather than abject. They didn’t make me want to perform these particular acts, but they did make me think about the complicated

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61 She did not understand when my parents chose to live in a tent on a bush property for years, but she did visit. She took some beautiful photos of them. She also took some odd, staged ones of my dreadlocked father in a rubbish dump. I can’t help thinking that by posing him there, getting him to perform the ‘homeless’ trope, she was hoping he would see himself from her perspective.

62 At least the amount of money that is apportioned them, and the way they have been deployed for offensive action over the years


If this seems polemical, reading Vaneigem’s Situationist manifesto The Revolution of Everyday Life will make it read like a calming meditation. Everything is relative, after all.
push and pull of desires within me. Given that Bosch maintained a reputation as a Good Christian and Family Man I doubt he had models sit for him in these law-defying formations. There was surely imagination involved. The delightful garden seems internal, a bodily environment where buildings look like organs and joy and despair jostle in a purer form than they do in the outside world. To me this all suggests a form of internal rehearsal. If this happens then what? If we joyously dance with animals and explore the fruits of this world to the fullest, will we be eaten by a blue monster with a pot on its head and ejected into a foul latrine for all eternity?

Vaneigem’s quote was taken from an article in which he outlines a sense of the socio-historical environment the work was painted in. In 1515 there were many groups (the Taborites, the Homines Intelligentiæ, the Anabaptists, the Family of Love, the Adamites and more) who were pacifists or nudists, or believed in free love or egalitarianism. The Spanish Inquisition routinely slaughtered these insurrections. I doubt the Adamites were as fanciful or flexible as Bosch’s painted figures, yet the history does draw the imaginary garden closer to lived lives. If you take his work as a self-portrait surely this deeply religious family man, who probably heard tell of utopian dreams and their quashing, was open to alterity.

*How to Deal with Difference* is a large installation made of many smaller things. It has been an exploration to articulate characters that make sense to me yet I do not think of as me. In finding and performing each character I have tried to build up a nuanced sense of the sociality that I am defined by. The characters are fragments — nihilistically looping, constantly rehearsing the same tiny script. I have tried to embrace the recognition of partiality that Butler suggests can allow individuals to practice freedom.64 By compositing the many simultaneous rehearsals, I have sought to bring out the implicit antagonism within the idea of the singular. *How to Deal with Difference* is an attempt to traverse65 the space between me as a self and me as social, exposing the gap between the intimate and the immense.

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64 While this could be read as a USA-centric style of libertarianism, my point is that while recognition may be partial we are dependent on the social, or otherwise put, the communal.
65 Or rehearse.
The Unsettled Self

I began this research wanting to make work that problematises; that breaks down the possibility of a complete self-portrait. I wanted to interrogate the individual’s dependence on the collective. I knew that through social relationships we simultaneously form and are formed by imaginaries. I knew that they are enormous and incomprehensible – built on the shifting ground of mutual contingency, and only seen from within our own edges. I set out to make work about these social imaginaries, and on the way got lost in the edges of myself. I say edges as if they were cohesive, but I found that it is chaos out there where I stop, where I am in contact with things that are not me – where an edge is articulated through disagreement. There are obvious boundaries like undue violence and bigoted slogans. But mostly it’s a lot less clear. It is unsettling how quickly an edge shifts or stretches and articulation crumbles. I’ve only been able to sense them momentarily by walking my outskirts till the ground seems unstable, unable to hold me; by rehearsing the social within the self.

I approached this through multiple narratives and points of view running simultaneously in the space of installations. These varying perspectives act as markers of the social, of my attempts to imaginatively engage with the difference and otherness that define my own sense of self. Objectively, you can see that they are me. Yet I think their contradictions do push this objectivity towards a limit, forming an implicit antagonism.

Of course, the main thing I found was something I already knew. Enormous things are exciting to imagine, but hard to install (conceptually and physically). The indulgence of this project makes me feel uneasy. Having spent a great deal of time with myself, where have I fallen in regard to Butler’s supposition that

this form of reflexivity seeks to resist the return to self in favour of a relocation of the self as a relational term. In yet other words, the “I” who works on herself, who crafts herself, is already formed by social relations and norms that are themselves in the making, that is, in process, open to crafting.

I have crafted problems. I have taken myself and the imagination seriously and, standing amidst the screens of my self-portrait I do feel unsettled. This comes from what I have articulated in the varying selves performed. Yet this cannot help but lead to a secondary unsettling from the sense of what I have not managed to explore.

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66 Along with ‘Go Home Loserz’ and ‘Fuck off we’re Full’ I had made a ‘Blood & Soil’ placard, and while I felt dirty and angry performing with the first two, the third felt too far away from me to relate to. I felt distant while filming myself with it, did not include the footage in the final work.

67 Butler, 2013, 100.
This is the impossible project that Butler is referring to – the crafting we do to find our relationality is a never-ending task.

The works are always iterations, always begging for more rehearsal. Only ever temporary frameworks for these unsettled imaginaries. As a project, this is a large and unwieldy one, and outrageously ambitious. Outrageous, or perhaps brazen because it seems naive to want this much, and to expect this much of others. The installations can be read as an active portrait of my struggles to define myself, in relation. To navigate towards articulation, which in itself “risks a clarity that does not reveal the extent of an actual complexity”.68 It is not based on a data set, but imagination. The research is full of an agonized indeterminacy, which I see as emblematic of being a self with a social imaginary shaped by neoliberalism. Part of the nature of this project is to figurise the constantly shifting ground that keeps wearing out modes of practice, or reconstituting them without reference to their contingency. We can’t get out of ourselves, but it’s hard to put your finger on the social. Our shared imaginary is not an ideal that we are reaching for, but the result of how we are. As such, it is directly responsive to how we are, now. And will be in the next moment, and the next. I’ll leave you facing the indifference.

-Charming spot. Inspiring prospects. Let’s go.
-We can’t.
-Why not?
-We’re waiting for Difference.
-Ah! You’re sure it was here?
-What?
-That we were to wait.
-Where else would it be?
-Hmm. But not the...you know, the kind...
-Are you kind?
-Surely sometimes.
-Definitely not all the time.
-It depends ...*gasp* is that it?
-What?
-Difference.
-Hard to tell.
-I think it’s just the same. 69

68 Hirshhorn, 2011, 299.
69 Barstardised Samuel Beckett – lines taken from Waiting For Godot (Beckett, 1956, 10) were rewritten and performed for How to Deal with Difference (2018).
Fig. 29. Freya Pitt, *How to Deal with Difference* [animation development still], 2018.
Bibliography


Appendices

A. How to Deal With Difference
Installation Images from Master of Fine Arts Exhibition, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia, December 3rd-9th 2018.

B. Imagine You Were Falling
Development installation at VCA Artspace, 2018.

C. Oh Galileo, My Galileo
Studio development installation, 2017.

D. Sitting Antagonism
Studio development installation at VCA Artspace, 2018.

E. Freynation

F. You, Me and the Bittersweet
Studio development installation, 2017.
A. How to Deal With Difference

Installation image by Christo Crocker, 2018

Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2018
Installation image by Christo Crocker, 2018

Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2018
B. Imagine You Were Falling

Exploring the interplay between the physical and the psychical in the construction of self, *Imagine You Were Falling* employs plaster body parts in functional and aesthetic roles of propping, holding and encasing the elements of a lo-fi projection device.
The three legs of a stool are encased in plaster casts of my own legs. They are holding up a rotating acetate tube painted with pink clouds. A light inside casts the shadow of the clouds on a round screen ahead. The light is held by a tripod, but has a section of my plaster cast arm gripping it, and the screen is held by another arm protruding from the wall. The clouds are projected beyond the edge of the screen, encroaching on the rest of the room, and their reflected light is cast on the opposite wall. A round mirror sits in the opposite corner to the lo-fi projection device and screen, reflecting the installation back towards itself – this time inclusive of any viewers. Along with the low hum of the motor working to turn the acetate tube there are three speakers.

From one I talk about an essay by Hito Steyerl that I really like, titled *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective*. The title of this work comes from the first line of Hito’s essay:

> It was an essay by Hito Steyerl that began “Imagine you are falling, and there is no ground”. She goes on to talk about the relevance of free fall and motion in our social and political world-making. It’s really good.

She talks about things like ‘what if we were all falling together? Simultaneous movement. I mean you wouldn’t notice, right? I guess usually the horizon’d be a giveaway, but what if someone took it and didn’t put it back where you thought it’d be. People can be real jerks like that. And if we were all falling all it would take is one jerk and we’d be lost, not knowing. And when isn’t there at least one jerk? I guess it wouldn’t really matter. If we didn’t know. But even the idea makes me uncomfortable. It’s like the matrix, yeah? Like, screw you laws of physics, we’ll move however we want. Or at least, like, how important is reality? And how do you decide what is real, and who falls? Cos someone always falls. Hito didn’t say any of that. She was mostly talking about a philosophical groundlessness. You should go read the essay.

Another recites:

> There once were people who were confused by the world. They wanted a lot from it. A lot more. Or a lot less. Definitely a lot different. Feeling a great stirring in their chests they called it desire. With each thudding heartbeat they fell father away from something important. Or towards it. When they left in pursuit of the horizon, they said it had nothing to do with this chest thing. But everyone knew that wasn’t true, that they now followed desire and would to the ends of the earth.

From the third a voice (my voice) reads various quotes relating to falling, with references ranging from the scientific, romantic and poetic as well as some bad jokes.
C. Oh Galileo, My Galileo

*Oh Galileo, My Galileo* is an installation work made in the frame of an assemblage. Initially presenting viewers with a simple shadow scene with a large, rotating sphere in one corner and a series of smaller spherical pendulums moving back and forth, the work’s first impression is of form and movement. As viewers walk around the rear projected screen to see spatial construction of the image, their path is momentarily obstructed by a swinging pendulum/speaker, with a reading of dense mathematical logic (taken from Galileo’s ‘Two Chief World Systems’). On stepping around the pendulum, they find themselves in a moving image, audio and found objects installation. The space is fractured, with screens of varying scale and orientation arranged throughout. Stepping in, their shadow is cast within the shadow scene they initially saw from the reverse side. They can see the overhead projector that casts the light, and the mirror ball creating the large rotating sphere, as well as the smaller mirror balls that cast the smaller, swinging shadows. A large digital projection on the opposite wall shows an upside down live feed of the initial shadow scene, now including the viewer and their shadow as they move through the space.

I had become fascinated by the idea that Galileo was willing to stand by his scientific beliefs through exile and excommunication, in defiance of what was socially appropriate; yet put his daughters in a convent when they were 12 and 13 years old, barely seeing them, upholding the social laws that he didn’t have equations for.

Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2017
Myself performing the mother of Galileo’s children, Marina Gamba. She is often described as an una donna di facile costume or ‘a woman whose clothes came off easily’, which I enacted with a click of my fingers and some video editing.

Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2017

Freya Pitt, Oh Galileo, My Galileo [animation still], 2017.

Myself performing Simplicio and Salviati from Galileo’s *Discourses* (1638), with diagrams taken from the text composited over my face(s):
D. Sitting Antagonism

A whispering voice tries to catch your attention - “Psssst. Hey. Hey you! Heeey hey come over here.” It is coming from a stool. “Yeah, just come and sit in me. Come oooon. Just sit on me pleeeeease.” An open book (Agnostics, by Chantal Mouffe) hangs above the stool. The voice starts out begging for interaction, promising a simple relationship and resolution if the viewer only engages, “It’s just what we need. Just you, sitting on me. It’ll be so right. Please... please do sit on me. Everything will be so good if you do, promise. It’s so simple! Just a sit! I’m totally asking for it. Come on hey, pleaaaase!”

Yet if the viewer accedes and sits, while the begging voice stops, it is only replaced by a dramatic soundtrack, as if building up to a war or climax. This builds a sense of narrative tension, but does not offer an active relationship as initially suggested. Nothing else happens. It is a bit underwhelming. The book, Agonism, quietly hanging throughout, is now at a readable height. It is a social theory work outlining Mouffe’s argument that we live in a world of ‘post-politics’ where there is too much centrism within all parties - with a particular focus on the failure of the left to offer a viable alternative to global capitalism. It is pretty hard going.

This work is an attempt to draw out the complex antagonism that I think plays a part in all participatory works (and where do you draw that line, huh), where the viewer is invited to ‘participate’ in something with very prescribed boundaries. Often I think if the boundaries are lessened so too is the effect of the relationship.
E. Freynation

Me making art to welcome my social relations into myself brings the idea of hospitality to mind. Philosopher Jacques Derrida discusses hospitality as a sort of paradoxical beckoning, where the stranger is only welcomed inasmuch as there are limitations on that welcome70. If I was not Australian what would it mean for me to welcome others to Australia? How much would I give up for the sake of another?

From this the work Freynation was developed, where a delineated area including some wall, floor and stool was covered in a wallpaper-esque forest scene. While the floor and stool’s forest was papered on, the wall section was projected, and had small versions of me periodically peeping out from the undergrowth. When the stool is sat on, a welcome party emerges from the forest, followed by a series of short scenes where the inhabitants of Freynation ‘welcome’ the newcomer/stoolsitter. From a judge’s reading of the constitution to onlookers giggling and pointing, to police-passport checks and overzealous greetings by lovelorn inhabitants, the ‘characters’ bring different associations and expectations. The characters are relatively small within the jungle environment, which works well in establishing an imagined world with its own rules and scale. However as they all inhabit separate scenes, the relationality between the points of view is not as cohesive or complex as I would like.

F. You, Me and the Bittersweet

In her essay 'Eros the Bittersweet', Anne Carson says of Sappho's fragment 31 “It is not a poem about the three of them as individuals, but about the geometrical figure formed by their perception of one another, and the gaps in that perception. It is an image of the distances between them.” As a clear description of the sociality of space, this seemed a good starting point. So for the early work 'You, Me and the Bittersweet', I filmed myself as the poet Sappho and as the listening man, and arranged them in a triangle with a mirror forming the third point. Standing within the triangle, I am faced with myself as Sappho and a man who listens. Turning away from them, to face the mirror, is my reflection. The triangle acts as a boundary, where I hail myself from its three extremities. There is a strange stretching and folding of myself through time; the time of the poem to Carson’s interrogation as well as the time from the-performing-to-camera to the viewing in its rearrangement.

If this is a self-portrait, it is one dedicated to getting outside the self. I have not lived a moment like the one Sappho describes. In performing it, I was trying to relate to the described experience. In this attempt I was drawing on a multitude of my own, ‘real’ involvements. By turning them into relational inference rather than narratives in and of themselves have I given myself a new experience? Can I be said to have experienced the same moments as Sappho (or Carson)? In any case, as a recital of a poem written on the Isle of Lesbos by a poet who died in 570 BC, the relationality is stretched very far indeed. Moving forwards I wanted to make works that got closer to the elements that make me, and for there to be more contributors to me, more sociality.

Sappho Fragment 31:

That man seems to me to be equal to the gods
who is sitting opposite you
and hears you nearby
speaking sweetly

and laughing delightfully, which indeed
makes my heart flutter in my breast;
for when I look at you even for a short time,
it is no longer possible for me to speak

but it is as if my tongue is broken
and immediately a subtle fire has run over my skin,
I cannot see anything with my eyes,
and my ears are buzzing

a cold sweat comes over me, trembling
seizes me all over, I am paler
than grass, and I seem nearly
to have died.

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Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2017

Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2018
Installation image by Freya Pitt, 2018