HISTORY TRACE LOSS

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Abstract

History Trace Loss is a research project investigating impermanence and mortality, emotional responses to death, and what might happen when we die through studio-based research, public outcomes and a final exhibition comprising three main works. The works combine the photographic object or architectural space with projected video and are aimed at representing inner emotion or a sense of the otherworldly. The research project investigates the mediums I use, particularly projection, and its relationship to the impermanence of life. The dissertation aims to situate the practice within art historical and contemporary art traditions - particularly superimposition and projection - and considers the relationship of visual technologies in conjuring otherworldly visions and evoking the immaterial.

There are three main areas of inquiry within this project and these are explored throughout the research and specifically addressed in the final works and this paper.

These are: History Trace Loss
By exploring the connections between these three ideas and linking the works conceptually, the research investigates how these notions can be expressed to the viewer through video projection.

**History**, the record of what has once been and is now gone, was explored through an investigation of architectural spaces that hold intense feelings of the past. An immersive installation explores the undefined presence that is felt in empty spaces.

**Trace** was explored through a series of photographic prints combined with video projection. The spaces photographed suggest an otherworldly presence and traces of history. By combining the photographic object with video projection, this work aims to blur materiality and immateriality.

**Loss** was investigated through a series of lens-based works that sought to represent personal emotions. Exploring the inner self, this part of the research aims to utilise projection to alter perception and expose what is unseen.
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 9867 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Yandell Walton
Preface

Work carried out in collaboration has been indicated in the list of illustrations and none of these are being put forward for examination.

Editorial assistance from Geoff Scott for written component.
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Introduction

I could describe the sudden electrocution of my first partner as an experience that ‘opened my senses’ to the existence of life after death. I think most people who have lost loved ones could relate to this yearning for and holding on to the person lost; the hope they are not just dead, rotting in the ground. This imagined eternal existence could be described as energy seen or unseen, as memory embedded in the living, or as echoes of the past that mark spaces and architecture. I am not interested in an investigation for truth or a definite understanding of what happens when we die but rather how powerful these feelings are that may conjure up the otherworldly as a material experience. My work has often represented the emotions felt when dealing with death. These emotions are usually keep guarded and unseen. Through this research I have continued an exploration of these emotions using video projection with an aim of revealing what is unseen. Driven by unanswerable questions about the afterlife, the research seeks to find something material in the immaterial through the analogous relationship between the actual and the virtual. The ambiguous questions of what happens after death are related to the experiments and developmental works that blur the distinction between the actual and the virtual in an attempt to evoke the unclear nature of the investigation.

Creating work using digital technology, I combine projection with architectural space or objects in an attempt to blur the distinction between the actual and the projected. Embedded in my practice is the melancholy that surrounds death and mortality. I could describe this as a personal investigation of emotion and memory, but also what haunts many through mortality. The medium of projection installation uses actual architectural space or objects and combines this with virtual imagery. This is intended to represent what we consider actuality - the here, the now, the tangible; embedded within the immaterial, that which we can not physically touch or see but we may feel. It is important for me to provide conceptual framework that articulates the aesthetic connection in my work that evokes a sense of the otherworldly through projection. The otherworldly is that which seems to belong to a spiritual or imaginary world rather than the real world.
Chapter One investigates photography as a medium that has two functions. On the one hand it has the ability to create an imprint or trace of what is in front of the lens; and on the other is its ability to evoke what is not visible. In this last capacity, it is associated with the supernatural. I investigate photography’s relationship with death and superimposition as a technique used in 19th century spirit photography to represent the otherworldly. To superimpose is to set or place something on or over something else. Superimposition in art is the overlapping of two or more images on one surface. I am interested in how this technique has been used to represent spirits throughout 19th century photography, early projection and more recently in contemporary art.

Chapter Two investigates early projection works and the use of superimposition within stage shows that represented spirits and ghouls. The transparency and use of layers, shadow and light through the magic lantern, phantasmagoria and the Pepper’s Ghost technique is explored in reference to my practice.
Chapter Three explores technology’s relationship to how we perceive space and time - in particular, ideas explored by Jeffrey Sconce in Haunted Media and how technological advancements throughout history have suggested we can communicate with the dead; how telecommunication, computer and screen technology provided disembodied connection, which in turn provided a relationship between new technology and the otherworldly. The connection between technology and change will be discussed through looking at my two works Remains and Journey Duchess of Spring Street.

Chapter Four focuses on the work of Bill Viola in reference to the moving image as a time-based medium. Techniques used are then compared to my work Still Present to highlight the blur between the actual and virtual.

Chapter Five considers the viewer’s emotional response to Viola’s work, and similarities in my own work that evoke such reactions.

In the following chapters, I will focus on the three aspects that continually recur in my work: History, the past, what we have experienced and what is no longer; Trace, what we have left behind, the mark left on others or the world around us; Loss, an emotion, an inner personal experience not seen by others.

Chapter Six focuses on History in relation to three key works: Impermanence, Transition and Absent Presence (Townsville). The three site-specific projects informed the new work Absent Presence (VCA), mixing animated light movement with shadows recorded on site. I compare these works to the projection installation The Refusal of Time, by William Kentridge, which employs shadow as a metaphor for the past.

Chapter Seven explores notions of Trace through an investigation of architectural spaces that hold a history of past inhabitants. Presence and The Home both combine photography and animated projection to create a tension between the material and immaterial by combining the actual or object with the virtual.

Chapter Eight investigates the emotional response to Loss through an investigation of inner feelings, representing the unseen. The works explore grief, anger and frustration and represent the energy we feel but may not reveal to the outside world. I discuss the work Inner View, exploring the digital processes used.

Photography - Capturing the Immaterial as Material

Photography, both digital and analogue, has been an important part of my work in many different forms and is explored during this research. I felt I needed to investigate what the photographic image means in relation to the concepts in my work; how the photographic image is experienced when combined with moving image; and what relationship photography has to memory and death. How the photographic image is produced and how it is perceived helps situate an understanding of how the photographic image is interpreted in my work. This chapter explores photography’s nature. On the one hand, it represents the material world and, on the other, it has an apparent relationship with the otherworldly.

Photography can be described as the process of recording images on sensitized material by the action of light. Therefore, photography represents an aspect of reality through the imprint of light on the negative of what is in front of the lens. Its unique ability to record the visible material world gives photography an apparent truth and accuracy.

The mechanical and chemical process of photography, although scientifically explainable, can be considered an almost magical phenomenon as the image miraculously appears from nothing in the darkroom process. Although a chemical method, this inherently wondrous process of the darkroom, where the image literally appears before your eyes, heightens an otherworldly consideration of photography.

Photography’s indexical quality, in contrast to its mystical quality, creates an ambiguity surrounding the medium, as stated by John Harvey in his book *Photography and Spirit*:

“The paradox of photography’s double identity: at one and the same time an instrument for scientific enquiry into the visible world and, conversely, the uncanny, almost magical process able to conjure up the semblance of shadows and, with it, supernatural associations.”

2. Ibid.
Photography presents something that has material existence - it is capturing actuality - but this ability appears magical or approximating the metaphysical. Through the chemical process an image reappears from actuality, creating a parallel reality. The uncanny ability of photography to produce a double of its subject aligns the medium with the occult. Photography can be described as mediated reality, a representation of the real. Tom Gunning describes photography as uncanny in terms of creating a parallel world and suggests:

“At the same time that the daguerreotype [the first publicly announced photographic process] recorded the visual nature of material reality it also seemed to dematerialize it, to transform it into a ghostly double.”

The photograph’s ability to present what has been and gone connects photography with death. The photographic image is representational of impermanence through its representation of a past experience. The represented is now absent and it is this absence that resonates through the photographic image. In the first part of his book Camera Lucida, the literary theorist Roland Barthes focuses an inquiry into the nature and essence of photography. He investigated the photograph’s ability to present what ‘has been’ and highlights an essential connection between death and photography. Photography is associated with absence because “the photo makes one aware of looking at the past and the distance between now and then”.

This relationship with the past, the occult, and photography’s indexical nature gives the medium an uncertainty and seems aligned with the ambiguous answer to the question “what happens when we die?” This is a question that haunts me and informs my practice. Through investigating spirit photography from the 19th century, the medium’s pull between fact and fiction is evident. The need for us, as humans, to prove or make material the immaterial is apparent through photography’s history of representing the otherworldly in spirit photographs.

Spirit Photography

A unique characteristic of photography is its veracity and indexical quality. But from the 1860s onwards photography was also used to provide evidence for occult phenomena through spirit photography. Spirit photographs used techniques such as superimposition and double exposure that captured ‘extras’, ghostly figures (Image 9). The mechanical process used in spirit photography is termed ‘multiple exposure’ or ‘double printing’. ‘Multiple exposure’ is the technique of exposing light from more than one image onto the one negative. ‘Double printing’ involves printing more than one negative on to the one image by exposing the paper twice. The technique allows the layers to create different transparencies, often resulting in a translucent layer revealing the image underneath. If a figure is superimposed on to a background layer, the figure appears translucent. The aesthetic effect of superimposition produces a ghost-like image. The tension between the material and immaterial is achieved with this technique through the transparency of the image layers. Therefore superimposition presents the instability of actual and virtual within the image.

Spirit photography questioned the core of what it was trying to prove. The destabilisation of truth and fiction through superimposition parallels paradoxical questions around the afterlife. The veracity of the photograph and the interrogation caused by the superimposed apparitions created tensions that questioned truth and is aligned to the questions that drive my practice about life after death.

Simone Natale, in his article *A short history of superimposition: From spirit photography to early cinema*, argues that visual representation of ghosts in the 19th century through superimposition “wavered between religious and spectacle, fiction and realism, and still and moving pictures”.\(^8\) Therefore, the ambiguity of spirit photography paralleled common questions about our existence and represented the perplexing nature of the subject matter. Looking at superimposition as a visual technique in photography, Natale suggests that “its history reveals the trajectory of a visual culture that was haunted by ghosts, dreams, visions, and the contradictory status of the photographic image”.\(^9\)

The Modern Spiritualist Movement, also known as Spiritualism, developed in North America in the mid 19th century and then quickly spread to Europe. Its members claimed they could communicate with the deceased. The movement utilised ‘mediums’\(^10\), people claiming to communicate with spirits often through means such as séances. In the 1860s, photographers began to claim to have captured the deceased on film, and Spiritualist believers had the chance to obtain a post-mortem portrait of their loved ones. Here the photographic superimposition, once a mishap or mistake, was being embraced by photographers to create representations of so-called ghostly figures. Spirit photography for believers proved an existence of the afterlife. Photographs of spirits were relics from the ‘other side’ – evidence not so much that the dead had been but that they continued to be; and reminders for the living not of their mortality but of their immortality.\(^11\)

William H. Mumler was the first on record to present as a ‘medium’ taking spirit photographs.\(^12\) He established a successful commercial enterprise photographing portraits of people in his New York studio that he alleged revealed figurative traces of deceased loved ones. Many spiritualists saw this as scientific verification of their beliefs, and the success of Mumler’s enterprise gave proof to the claims. Through taking advantage of mourners, Mumler’s success shows the fascination we as humans have with wanting to know what happens when we die and get comfort in knowing where our deceased loved ones are.

Mumler claimed to be a photographic medium in the service of spirits, and his wife, Hannah (a medium since childhood), was often present during the sittings. There was a theatrical manner in which Mumler and his wife presented during a sitting. The dramatic nature of the sittings blurred the boundary between entertainment and truth. After complaints that the spirits resembled living people and an ongoing controversy around intended deception, Mumler was brought to trial for fraud. Unable to determine the exact procedure in court, Mumler was declared innocent. Although Mumler’s reputation was tainted, many others in America and Europe claimed to photograph spirits.\(^13\)

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9. Ibid., 128.
10. Mediums are people that supposedly mediate communication between spirits of the dead and human beings.
12. Chéroux, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*
13. Ibid.
On the one hand, spiritualists sought to prove the existence of the otherworldly through spirit photography, but on the other hand the images functioned as entertainment. That polarity between the spirit photograph as an authentic image and spirit photograph as theatrics of mocking creates an uncertainty that reflected the uncertainty around the human condition and what happens after death. There was a tension between the real and the imagined, the authentic and the fake. In his essay *Ghost Dialectics*, Clement Chéroux examines the dialectic relationship between the two functions of spirit photographs and states: “It is no surprise that superimposition should simultaneously have produced an iconography of belief and another of entertainment.”

The popularity of the spirit photograph phenomenon served a common desire for the living to connect with deceased loved ones. Through Spiritualism, spirit photography demonstrated the possibility of communicating with the dead. Through entertainment, the photographs mocked the belief in the otherworldly through fraud and trickery. The juxtaposition of mystification and demystification parallels the uncertainty about life after death. That is, the uncertainty of what happens when we die can be seen as parallel to the uncertainty of spirit photography.

Harvey states:

“Spirit, unlike any other subject matter that the camera would survey, drew attention to the paradox of photography’s double identity; at one and the same time an instrument for scientific enquiry in the visible world and, conversely, an uncanny, almost magical process able to conjure up the semblance of shadows and, with it, supernatural associations.”

While spirit photography used superimposition techniques, the results were limited to photography only. In contrast, superimposition has been used in my own work in a combination of photography and projection to achieve broader results (Images 10 & 11). Using photography and introducing a video-projected element superimposed on to the surface of the photograph, the shift between material and immaterial is blurred and the digital projection becomes part of the image. The inanimate image thus becomes animate.

In addition, video projection within architectural space can be described as a further form of superimposition. This technique is employed in my own practice to conjure feelings of the otherworldly through new technology such as digital media and video projection.

Early Projection

The magic lantern utilised the technique of projection to represent apparitions through superimposition. The magic lantern was a lens-based device dating back to at least the 17th century and in its earliest form utilised a candle and concave mirror (Image 12). Gaining popularity through the entertainment industry and used by people claiming to conjure ghosts and spirits, it was developed and modified to enable smooth dissolves and movement for stage shows to project images that appeared and disappeared. In the late 1790s, Etienne Gaspard Robertson popularised superimposition in Gothic stage shows known as ‘Phantasmagoria’, which used sophisticated advancements on the magic lantern to create the illusions of spectres, demons and the like.\(^\text{16}\)

Along with superimposition, a number of techniques were used in theatrical stage shows using projection, including installing the projectors out of sight from the audience, using multiple projectors, dissolves, and projecting on to drapes, wet cloth or smoke. The illusion achieved with this technology was new and among the first that involved animated images. This movement heightened the believability of the represented apparitions and caused audiences to react in fear and bewilderment. The combination of superimposition, movement and not grasping the materiality of shadows and props played on the audience’s anxieties of death and the afterlife.\(^\text{17}\)

In *Phantasmagoria Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, Marina Warner describes the audience’s experience:

"The intrinsic subject matter of phantasmagoria turned to spectral illusion - morbid, frequently macabre, supernatural, fit to inspire terror and dread, those qualities of the sublime. It foreshadows the function of cinema as stimulant, and prepared the ground for the medium’s entanglement with hauntings, possession, and spirit visions."\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{17}\) Natale, "A Short History of Superimposition: From Spirit Photography to Early Cinema."
Through the use of new technologies of illusion in phantasmagoria, the stage shows were compelling. Although present-day audiences have a greater understanding of these technologies, some of these techniques are still used to enhance the effect of illusion in contemporary art practice. For example, illusion is created in my own work through hidden technologies that separate the image from its point of production; and the blur between the actual and projected increases the believability of the projected image, evoking feelings of the otherworldly. Works that use superimposition are experienced as transient, shifting between dualities. The dichotomy between material and immaterial, actual and virtual, fixed and moving is evoked through using the technique and “shape it as a body of technologies and knowledge that wavered between realism and fantasy, stasis and movement, fiction and belief”.

It is the shift between dualities that I have focused on through a series of practical experiments using projection. During the research I have experimented with different techniques; projecting on to a range of surfaces; creating works that hide technology; and using multiple projectors. One of these works will be briefly discussed in relation to how the materials or techniques used help create a sense of the otherworldly.

The Pepper’s Ghost illusion was invented by Professor John Henry Pepper and introduced into theatres in the 1860s. It is a technique used to make objects or people appear and disappear or become transparent. In early stage shows, Pepper’s Ghost combined real actors and projected images that were reflected off a glass screen located between the audience and the actors, in which the reflected images appeared ghost-like (Image 13.) The technique is still used in the entertainment and commercial industries, although with more advanced technology and materials. Holographic film is one of the products on the market that mimic the Pepper’s Ghost technique. This product was used in my work Infinitum, created in collaboration with fashion label Tettman.Doust (Image 14).

The work had a holographic like effect where the figure looked as though it was suspended in three-dimensional space. Although this technique was effective in giving a ghost-like transparent appearance, the materials’ expense prevented further developments with the product. Other techniques that were celebrated in early projection stage shows include hiding the projector and layering of images were introduced in to new works. These works were aimed at pushing the boundaries of how projection was presented in contemporary art, through illusion, combining material objects or architectural space with projected imagery.

21. The Haunted Mansion Disney (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fArYLSRcub0), Diesel fashion show (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OawD-t3s0PQ), 2Pac hologram for MTV (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5xBW-rKmeY)
Electronic Media and the Absent Presence

My practice sits within a clear historical framework that draws on connections between novel technologies to evoke the otherworldly. I am interested in how technological progress has been connected with the otherworldly. Throughout the history of technological advancements such as the telegraph, radio transmission, television and computers, which accommodate disembodied communication, there have been claims that these may allow communication with the dead. It is this history and a continuing advancement of disembodied communication that contributes to a feeling of the otherworldly in artworks using mediums such as projection. Two works will be discussed that highlight change and transformation that use technology such as an old telecommunications device, or juxtaposing new technology within an obsolete elevator shaft.

Throughout history, technology has influenced new ways of thinking about time and space. This history, the ‘liveness’ of technology, and the consistent increase in disembodied communication continues to feed the imagination surrounding the otherworldly. In his book The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918, Stephen Kern describes technology modifying our understanding of the past, present and the future. He pinpoints great technological achievements explaining how the:

“Phonograph and cinema are evaluated in terms of the way they modified the sense of the past, the telephone and World Standard Time are seen restructuring the experience of the present, the steamship and the Schlieffen Plan reflect the desire to control the future.”

The telegraph, invented in the mid 19th century, uses electrical signals usually conveyed via dedicated telecommunication lines or radio for human-to-human transmission of coded text messages. The new telecommunication technology made possible instantaneous exchanges between people separated by large distances. The physical absence of the body, yet the ability to communicate with the non-present, parallels the early Modern Spiritualists’ belief that communication with the dead was possible. The telegraph made possible a connection between people even though there was a physical separation. This invention made way for new ways of thinking about time and space, and with Spiritualism, technological advancements such as radio waves and television were regarded as a way of connecting with the dead.

In *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, Jeffrey Sconce details the history of media from the telegraph to radio, television and computers as having a “living presence”. That is, they can put us in instantaneous contact with existing realms outside our normal senses. *Haunted Media* looks at the social and historical circumstances that led to electronic media being described as ‘living’, and Jeffrey Sconce explains American Spiritualism as presenting:

“An early and most explicit intersection of technology and spirituality, of media and ‘mediums’. Enduring well beyond a fleeting movement of naive superstition at the dawn of the information age, the historical interrelationship of these competing visions of telegraphic ‘channelling’ continues to inform many speculative accounts of media and consciousness even today.”

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25. Ibid., 25.
The connection between electronic media and the paranormal has been noted through various new technologies being used to communicate with the dead. A continuous breakdown of the boundaries of space and time through technology links the technology and the otherworldly.

The exhibition *The Disembodied Spirit* featured both spirit photography and contemporary works by artists such as Bill Viola, Tracey Moffatt, Anna Gaskell and Gregory Crewdson. This exhibition explores the connection between spirit photography and contemporary works that show representations of ghosts to strive “for new understandings of vision and ‘reality’ in our contemporary, digitized, hypermediated world.” The works exhibited in *The Disembodied Spirit* represent the otherworldly through employing or suggesting historic photography or film techniques that reflect the techniques used in 19th century spirit photography. These dematerialising technologies parallel the idea of the otherworldly through continuing obsolescence. Alison Ferris describes:

“Ideals of a disembodied self in both the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries evolved directly from radical technological innovations, in as much as these utopian visions offered new possibilities for life and experience within a drastically changing world. These works also suggest, however, that such utopian ideals are shot through with anxiety, disturbance, and a kind of melancholy. In all, neither early spirit photography nor this contemporary work inveighs against an encroaching technological alienation; rather, they embrace technology, if somewhat warily, and derive from it vocabularies of fantasy and imagination - seen especially in representations of the ghost - with which to analyze ‘reality’ and the transforming human experience.”

Somewhat akin to disembodied forms of communication throughout history, computers, virtual reality and communication through applications such as Skype and Facetime parallel these ideas of the absent presence. Therefore these disembodied technologies of communication and the digital find a parallel in considering the concepts of my work, the otherworldly and the unseen.

Concepts relating to impermanence, change and obsolescence have been represented in works such as *Journey-Duchess of Spring Street* and *Remains* through the use of technology. *Journey-Duchess of Spring Street* was a site-specific work I created for the Windsor Hotel Art Prize 2013 (Images 15 & 16). A projected life-size figure climbed up the old elevator shaft carrying a chandelier, the sound of the crystals moving and the breath of the figure played through speakers. The figure had a ghost-like quality through the use of superimposition and slightly slowed-down timing. The work commented on the history of the site, its ups and downs, and represented the ‘climb’ or struggle of the hotel. The architecture of the old lift shaft symbolised the history of the hotel; the new technology symbolised progression and changing times; and the chandelier was a metaphor for the burden of financial hardship. There is an obvious contrast between the architecture, the represented chandelier, and the projected figure. All are located in different timeframes. Here the work is referencing the concepts of change through juxtaposing the projected video with historical architecture and symbolism.

27. Ibid., 47.
Image 16. Yandell Walton, Journey Duchess of Spring Street, 2013, Video Stills
My work *Remains* incorporated a looped video displayed on an iPhone4 placed within leaves on the floor of the gallery (Images 17 & 18). The video represents a figure lying on the ground; the camera pulls back from the lifeless eyes, referencing the soul floating out of the body, moving through the landscape, over the treetops and into the sky. *Remains* explores an out-of-body experience through long shots and slow edits, perhaps to an afterlife. There is a tension between actuality and virtuality and an intimate experience being viewed on the Iphone. The device being used in the work parallels the concepts regarding the impermanent nature of life. This connection between the concept and the technology was a starting point for further investigations incorporating specific technology to reflect a concept. For example, in the work Inner View, which will be discussed in a later chapter, video projection and digital SLR technology is used to highlight the unseen and inner world.
**Time-based Media**

The Tate Modern defines ‘time-based media’ as art that depends on technology and has duration as a dimension. Time-based media requires you to experience durational time in order to experience the medium. Therefore, video can be described as a time-based medium. Artworks such as video are experienced as transient and therefore highlight temporality. The media itself reflects on time as a concept through responding to and incorporating time. This chapter will focus on the moving image as a medium that reflects ideas of impermanence through an investigation of Bill Viola’s work and my own. A connection between works is established through the medium, and a particular motif used in both our works - the figure passing ‘through’ - is used as a metaphor for a border between the living and the dead.

The time-related nature of video is paralleled to concepts of death in Viola’s work. In *The Art of Bill Viola*, Otto Neumaier explores the temporal nature of video in relation to Viola’s subject matter surrounding mortality:

> “Human beings, as all living beings, are essentially creatures of time … As instruments of time, the materials of video, and by extension the moving image have as a part of their nature this fragility of temporal existence. [Video] is very well suited to expressing these concerns because of its specific temporality.”

Viola’s work *Ocean Without a Shore* was initially created for the 2007 Biennale di Venezia and was installed in the 15th century Venetian church of San Gallo, in which three existing stone altars were employed as recesses for the video screens. (Images 19 & 20) Acquired in 2008 by the National Galley of Victoria, the work was installed using high-definition monitors with altar-like constructions to evoke a chapel. Three screens show a series of figures passing through a transparent water wall; the figures appear un-saturated in colour until they break through the barrier with their limbs and bodies. The filming technique and high-definition technology made this work an extremely intense experience that relied in part on not being able to place exactly what the border was made of and why the saturation of colour altered when the figure moved through it. Justine Grace describes the work:

> "Human forms initially appear in a shadow of obscurity; the black and white silhouettes barely perceptible in the far-off distance. As each figure slowly moves forward, their outline becomes clearer until passing through the threshold that demarcates the spiritual from the earthly, and they emerge as a palpable presence within the viewer’s reality."^{30}

Through representation and visual effects, this work presents a consideration of the otherworldly. The work creates a pathway across these distinct realms that feels realistic through the screen quality and installation techniques. Viola stated it “is about the presence of the dead in our lives. The three stone altars in San Gallo become transparent surfaces for the manifestation of images of the dead attempting to re-enter our world”.^{31}

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The transition between there and here can be compared to the two-channel projection installation *Still Present* created for White Night 2013 in collaboration with animator Tobias Edwards. The features of a window are used to represent the boundary between the dead and living. Unlike Viola’s work, the ghost that inhabits the cathedral passes through the actual window and dissipates as a smoky substance on the other side, where the viewer stands. The use of rear and front projection gives the illusion of the ghost transforming into mist and entering our world; a ghost-like figure approaches the window as a rear projection, and as it disburses into a non-material substance, a front projection appears that represents the ghost as a smoky material passing up the outer wall. (Images 21 & 22) The technique of using multiple projectors to give the illusion that the figure inhabited actual space has informed the developed works for exhibition incorporating architecture with projection. This has also informed the works that combine photography and projection by creating an illusion that the projected figure passes through the architectural space of the two dimensional image.
Immersion + Emotion

I am interested in how works that explores death and mortality evoke emotion in the viewer, and what installation techniques can help enhance this reaction. I will discuss two of my works that have had this effect, and investigate the techniques that may have assisted this evocation.

Emergency was created in 2008 in collaboration with Clare Hassett and was the first of the works combining a photographic image and video projection (Image 23). In a gallery situation, a large photographic print was hung on the wall. It depicted a woman in a hospital waiting room, weeping. A hidden projector played a video of a ghost figure moving around her. The projection was masked to the work and seemingly interacted with the scene. During the exhibition it was noted many viewers began to weep in front of the work. I wondered how it evoked such intense responses. The blur between the photographic object within the gallery space and the projected video draws the viewer in and breaks down the boundaries between the work and the viewer. The otherworldly presence that seemingly moves through the photograph, combined with the viewer’s personal experience or imagination, produced a reaction akin to an actual experience.

The combination of actual and projected was also experienced in Impermanence (Image 24), a site-specific projection installation created in 2014 during the research. This work will be discussed in depth in a later chapter, but I want to note that the installation evoked a similar emotional reaction. This work was described by one viewer as “intense” and “powerful”; the viewer said she had to “hold back the tears” while experiencing the installation. I believe this reaction was achieved by creating a personal connection with the viewer in two ways: one, through an emotional connection that the viewer can sympathise with; or two, an immersive connection, where the viewer feels they are part of the work through being immersed in the installation and therefore feeling the work.

32. Georgia Mein explained her emotional response as the first visitor to the exhibition Impermanence at The Abbotsford Convent, 2014
By exploring universal questions including birth, life, death, perception, meaning and transience, Viola achieves a connection with his viewers. Viola describes time being the fundamental basis of his practice, and depicts the awareness of our own mortality as “conditio humana”, or “human condition”. Human condition is thus the unique features of being human, particularly ultimate concerns of our existence and what happens when we die. A focus on the human condition makes his work accessible to diverse audiences, touching them deeply through the subject, emotional content and technique. The questions around death that Viola investigates are core to my own concerns, and the use of immersive installation techniques is key to evoking emotional responses from the viewer. In *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, Viola introduces the core philosophies of his practice; the questions of why we die and how we deal with loss resonate in Viola’s work. He writes:

“There is no answer to birth or death. They are meant to be experienced, they can be approached and studied, but not finally answered ... Even though science tells me the reasons why the body stops functioning physically, I still have those questions.”

Like Viola, those specific questions regarding the temporality of our existence are among the questions that I address within my practice. I am interested in how this particular subject matter evokes emotion in the viewer, enough to bring them to tears, and what techniques are utilised to enhance that emotion. Cynthia Freeland describes being overwhelmed emotionally when viewing Viola’s work *The Passions*. She began to weep uncontrollably and could not leave the spot but watched the work over and over. This emotional response is familiar to me, both through personal experiences as a viewer of Viola’s work, and also watching viewers experiencing my work. The parallels between Viola’s work and mine are more than subject matter; emotional connection is achieved though the medium used and techniques in engaging the audience through immersion.

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34. The expression refers to human life or the human condition as such, its general character, raising the fundamental anthropological question: what makes human beings human.
HISTORY – Shadows of the past

This chapter examines one of the aspects explored in this research - history. I will first examine shadow and its connection with death. Next, I will look at immersive installations and how these spaces connect the viewer with the work through the use of space. I will then look at the work of William Kentridge and his use of shadow and installation, and finally compare my use of shadow in three works that each use immersion differently.

An investigation of history, time and what has been and gone has been explored through an investigation of movement, of light and figures, through architectural space. The research began with documenting the transition of light in architectural space, through filming time-lapse videos (Image 25). These were developed and projected on to photographic images of the architectural space (Image 26). These videos represented light and shadow with a focus on the architectural space. They were further developed through an investigation of figurative shadow and silhouette into three different site-specific works, Impermanence, Transition and Absent Presence (Townsville). These then informed the final work, Absent Presence (VCA).

The representation of the shadow has been explored throughout art history, with a strong connection to the macabre and death and to “construct allegories of loss and disappearance, evoking something that is beyond the object yet inseparable from it”. In my work the shadow acts as an analogy for what has been and gone, the past, and therefore reflects the history of the site. I am interested in how the shadow can be parable to the soul and therefore represent a person after they have passed. It is this connection to the soul, to death and the shadow-time relationship that attracts me to the shadow as a motif for absence, loss and memory. In Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century, Marina Warner describes shadow play:

“to delight audiences with thrills and terrors. But feelings that shadow play could prompt were also melancholy and reflective, and it happened that, at the same time as showmen were expanding their ingenuity in devising new illusions, artists were turning to shadow as a prime vehicle of ideas for absence, loss and memory”.

38. Warner, Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century 156.
Through the use of shadow and light, immersive environments are constructed that help to create a greater connection with the viewer. Immersive art makes the viewer aware of himself or herself within the work, addressing the viewer directly. Claire Bishop compares traditional media to installation, describing an embodiment of the viewer, and states:

“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. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.”

The viewer is therefore present in the space, a form of embodiment. The immersive nature of the shadow works developed through this research have three distinct ways that they are immersive: mimicking the real, through site-specificity to create a blur between the actual and the projected; the presence of the viewer within the artwork; interactivity, the work being informed or activated by the viewer.

South African artist William Kentridge has created an immersive installation through the use of projection and shadow in *The Refusal Of Time* [Image 27]. Kentridge has a distinctive practice that merges illustration, animation, film, printmaking and sculpture, set design, performance and sound. *The Refusal of Time*, first exhibited at Documenta13, was exhibited during the 2014 Perth International Arts Festival. Kentridge presented five large, separate video projections and sculptural elements within an installation also incorporating a soundscape playing through megaphones. The work reflects on residual elements of the hand-made in the 19th century industrialised world and nationalist desires to ‘control time’. For me, this work used the motif of the shadow to speak about memory, the past and evolution. The contrast between shadow, illustration and video creates an emphasis on what has been and gone through an absent present juxtaposition. Even though the work was a five-screen installation, it also incorporated sculptural elements, including chairs. This allowed the audience to be engaged in the work, moving the chairs if needed. The installation enabled the viewer to ‘walk into’ the work, therefore casting his or her own shadow and becoming ‘part of’ the work. The blur between the actual shadows of the viewers and the projected elements create an ambiguity that could be seen as a parallel to the concepts. William Kentridge and Peter L Galison write:

“The end of time. This time not because our mortal clock runs down, not because time depends on motion, or because motion itself is a shadow of frozen spacetime. No, here physics refuse time much more completely; time becomes an illusion, like our sense that water is smooth because our hands are too coarse to sense the atoms that make it up. Time refused; time as nothing but the crude approximation of an obsolete science.”

Unlike Kentridge, who references theories on time\textsuperscript{41}, history of a particular place was referred to in my site-specific work *Impermanence* (Image 28). The former Magdalen Asylum was a boarding house for wayward girls at the Abbotsford Convent; the site-specific installation was exhibited in the laundries where they worked. During my research I became aware of many stories told by previous residents, and I became aware that the institution housed some dark souls. *Impermanence* consisted of a four-channel installation; four projectors linked together using software through two Mac mini-computers. Being projected was a looped video incorporating architectural animation to highlight time and change, layered with figurative projections referencing the past residents. The blur between the actual and the projected was seamless using projection mapping techniques and multi-channel projection installation.

The past residents were referenced through projected silhouettes of pre-recorded actors. The theatrical costumes gave the work a narrative, and although this referenced the history I did not want to suggest narrative in the other two installations produced after. The future works experimented with different ways to incorporate the figure, including pre-recording actors, inviting the public to be recorded, or real-time on-site interactive recording.

\textsuperscript{41} Albert Einstein’s theories about relativity and the convergence of time zones in the beginning of the 20th century.
Transition was commissioned as part of a series of interventions for Urban Laboratory42 (Images 29 & 30). I was interested in these particular laneways as such transient spaces. Having a history of street art, the laneways encourage artists to create ephemeral works, and alongside this the laneways attract tourists, production companies, commuters and residents. The ever-changing city, through rapid developments and gentrification, made me consider what has been and gone. Unlike Impermanence, which tapped into the history of past residents, Transition was interested in engaging the present inhabitants of the laneway within the work. By creating a pop-up green screen (Image 31) I was able to invite the public to participate in the work. I filmed more than 60 people walking past the green screen and through postproduction techniques transformed them into shadows to project back into the laneway at night. The recorded shadows were projected from the opposite building, hiding the projector from full view. The effect mimicked the natural light and shadows that would inhabit the laneway although the people were absent. The public/passers-by noticed the shadows of absent people in the laneway, playing at a slower speed than reality to give the figures a ghostlike pace. The projected shadows were perceived as absent people who would normally be in the laneway. Unlike Impermanence, the work did not prompt a narrative through historical references.

42. http://urbanlaboratory.tumblr.com/
The work was developed further for a commission in Townsville using interactive technology to give real-time audience engagement in *Absent Presence (Townsville)* [Image 32 & 33]. Using a specifically developed program and KINECT sensor to film passers-by, the work recorded the audience and played them back in real time as projected shadows. The developed program also played back the recorded shadows as ‘ghost shadows’ randomly throughout the night. The viewer was confronted with their own shadow in real time, and other shadows of past people not present in the space. The overlap between the visible and invisible, past and present was presented through the immersive installation. The real-time interaction that was part of this work encouraged a playful engagement, which was not necessarily the interaction I was looking for.

The three works - *Impermanence, Absent Presence (Townsville)* and *Transition* - have informed the new work *Absent Presence (VCA)* for the MFA exhibition. Utilising the concepts from the three previous works, decisions regarding the recorded image, interaction and animation will determine the final site-specific work. Light, time and past inhabitants will be experienced in the immersive installation through the use of shadow and light.
Image 34. Yandell Walton, Presence, 2014, Photographic print & projection
TRACE - Stuck between here and there, if ‘there’ is a place.

I once stayed at an old hotel in Sydney, and while lying in bed I felt a distinct presence in the room. Sitting up and looking into the darkness I saw a kind of dark and shadowy figure. It was not an actual person, or at least it didn’t seem to have materiality or substance. But it was a definite presence. Immediately I had a feeling of who this person was, how they had died, and a direct relationship of the death to the hotel room. I didn’t care at that point what anyone else thought of me and left the hotel. I did not want to feel the presence of someone who had died; I did not want to think about the possibility that this person, or the person’s energy, was in the room, stuck.

Stuck between here and there, if ‘there’ is a place...

This chapter focuses on the works that use a combination of photographic stills and projection to represent traces that are left behind in reference to the idea of the uncanny. Through a series of photographic works documenting spaces that seem heavy with brooding history, I wanted to explore the feeling of presence in these empty spaces; the trace of what has been that still lingers. The series began with capturing stills on both a medium-format camera and digital SLR. I was interested in visiting these spaces alone and feeling the presence. The project was developed through an investigation into the history of these spaces, which informed the projected elements of the works introducing the figure as a ghost-like form projected on to the surface of the photograph (Image 35). It is the combination of still and animate that evokes a feeling of the uncanny, explored in my works Presence and The Home.
When investigating the history of the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne, I came across a newspaper notice (Image 36) regarding the death of a couple in a room in 1945. Interested in how spaces can hold energies of the past, the resulting work - Presence (Clarice Suttie 1915-1945) - seeks to represent traces of the woman as energy still present in the hotel (Image 37). Photographing one of the corridors in the hotel on medium-format film, the image was hand-printed as material object. A projection on to the surface of the photograph of a naked woman walking down the corridor plays on a loop, referencing the presence of the deceased woman. The combinations of media, both animate and inanimate, evokes a haunted feeling. The work was displayed in the hotel where the image was captured so the viewer was looking at the image that incorporated a ghost while looking at the actual hallway. This evoked a sense of depicting a parallel world, one where the spirit of the dead woman lived.

Image 36. The Canberra Times Wednesday 14 February 1945
From 1863 until 1975, the Good Shepherd Sisters operated the Magdalen Asylum at Abbotsford Convent. The building, known as Sacred Heart or ‘the home’, was the inspiration for The Home. I documented, through photography, the empty spaces that were once dormitories. During the visits I would feel a presence in the abandoned spaces, and through researching the past residents of the building I developed the new work combining projection and photography. Working with the photographic print as object, the work aims to blur the distinction between the material and immaterial.

Both of these works present a photographic image in much the same way as it would be traditionally presented as an object of contemplation, although they both have an animated element projected on to the surface. Through filming and editing techniques the projection provides a realistic representation of ghosts of the past, projected within the printed image. The works are ‘haunted’ through the use of photography and the representation of moving apparitions. In her book The Haunted Gallery, Lynda Nead discusses motion as an idea haunting all visual media and focuses on the uncanny effect of movement within visual media, particularly projection and film. Nead discusses the photographic likeness in still frames as being a kind of haunting, of what is no longer living, and the effect of the uncanny through a slippage of animate and inanimate.\(^43\) Still artworks are in a state of suspended animation, a frozen moment rather than one fully ended. The absence of movement provides for an “unwavering gaze of the viewer”.\(^44\) Nead associates the uncomfortable ambiguous boundaries between the inanimate and animate with what Freud describes as the uncanny. Discussing the disturbing power over the viewer, “the animated figure troubles the boundaries between life and death, nature and representation, movement and stasis”.\(^45\)

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44. Ibid., 45.
45. Ibid., 46.
Sigmund Freud defined the uncanny as investigating the notion of familiarity and threat that happens concurrently. Nead describes Freud’s investigation as sitting within the subject of aesthetics and the uncanny as a study of forms and feeling, a sub-category in the wider field of that which is frightening and arouses dread and horror. The uncanny is primarily an emotion and is the potential for the familiar to become unfamiliar, like confusion in a dream. “It is the moment of slippage between the real and the unreal, the familiar and the strange, the living and the ghostly.” The uncanny therefore blurs the distinction between the imaginary and reality, and this is what can be seen in my practice when combining an actual space or object with animated projected imagery. The still becomes animate. Nead suggests:

“Animation disturbs chronology, drawing the past into the present and reintroducing pre-modern beliefs to modernity. This is the folded time of the haunted gallery, where living pictures and moving statues confuse past, present and future and in which new technologies express archaic, magical thinking.”

Here Nead suggests that new technology brings a sense of uncanny through the introduction of the animate. In my works that combine projection and photography, the print is presented as a traditional artwork - a still photograph - and through projection a ghostly figure is introduced; the two-dimensional artwork seems to expand. The inanimate becomes animate, and there is a blur between the represented spirit world and this world in which the photographic object sits.

47. Nead, *The Haunted Gallery : Painting, Photography, Film C.1900*.
48. Ibid., 46-47.
49. Ibid., 47.
LOSS - Seeing the unseen

My partner often tells me that I am not present, not connected, not revealing the inner me. Some believe the body functions as a vessel for your soul; is the soul the inner you? I wish I could pull down my skin, rip open my body and expose my inner self in all its torments and vulnerabilities. Flickering deep within is the memory of the night my partner passed away. The flickers of these memories often remind me of the flickers of video projection, the light and the dark, the exposed and the not exposed.

Interested in the unseen and representing visually what the eye may not see, a series of new experimental works were made that used projection and a digital SLR camera. These works were an inquiry into representing an inner self or inner emotion through the lens of the camera. Walter Benjamin developed the idea that the operations of the camera introduce us to ‘unconscious optics’ as a kind of parallel to processes in psychoanalysis. He states:

“The camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations [...] its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulse.”

Image 41 & 42. Pipilotti Rist, I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much, 1986 Video stills
The artist Pipilotti Rist is motivated by the inner world of video, and through her work she uses mishaps and glitches to parallel her own unconscious. She explains:

"I don’t want to copy reality in my work; reality is always much sharper and more contrasted than anything which can ever be created with video. Video has its own particular qualities, its own lousy, nervous, inner-world quality.”

When a projection is recorded through the lens of a digital SLR camera it has particular qualities, including a flickering effect and banding of colours. This was noticed after multiple attempts to document my projection works using a digital SLR camera and DLP projector. The banding effect, known as the “rainbow effect”, would be evident in camera. DLP projectors that have a single chip and a spinning colour wheel cause it to produce visible colour separation artefacts and are more prominent through a digital SLR camera lens.

Banding experiments were a series of observations of the effect that was captured through this process, using a digital SLR camera when using a projector as the light source illuminating the subject. Colours that were not seen by the eye were picked up by the camera and recorded (Images 39 & 42).

Interested in capturing an intimate experience, the work developed into an exploration of the emotion felt when dealing with loss. Inner View utilised the flickering that the technique creates to parallel the unveiling of emotion. To tap into that emotion through working with an actor is an intense experience - translating emotion to the actor, to then represent it as action, to be captured as moving image. What was seen in the studio was very different to what the camera was picking up. The camera unveiled the flickers’ intensity, the emotion when dealing with loss.

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52. Digital Light Processing (DLP) projector. A type of projector that uses a digital micromirror device.
Conclusion

This practice-led research has explored the use of video projection in my practice in a quest to connect the medium with the concepts of death, mortality and the unseen. Through an investigation of the medium of projection and creating experimental and site-specific works, I have developed works that blur the boundary of actual and virtual and evoke the idea of otherworldly and unseen.

A major focus of this paper has been on superimposition in 19th century photography and early projection and an exploration of how photography and technology is perceived in relation to absence and death. Further, it investigates how time-based media is experienced and how immersive installation techniques heighten an emotional response in the viewer. History, trace and loss are then discussed as major themes that inform experimental works, site-specific projects and the final works on exhibition.

This practice-led research has given me an understanding of the connection between medium and concept and how video projection is perceived and experienced within my work. Being drawn to the blur between material and immaterial, the final works on exhibit aim to make what is invisible, visible and to shift perceptions. The works create an experience of absent presence by exploring different ways of fusing projection and the actual to question ideas surrounding death and its effects. The otherworldly and unseen are represented through the work that incorporates architectural space, object and projection. The body as absent or present is reference in each work through light and shadow.

For me, the medium of projection parallels ideas around impermanence and the unseen through its fusion with actual space; flicker and pulse; creation of light and shadow.
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Appendices
Works presented at Graduate exhibition

**Image 46-48.**
Yandell Walton
*The Home* 2014
Photographic prints & looped video projection

**Image 49 & 50.**
Yandell Walton
*Transition* 2013
Looped video projection

**Image 51.**
Yandell Walton
*Transition* 2013 & *Absent Presence (VCA)* 2014
Looped video projection & Interactive projection installation

**Image 52 - 57.**
Yandell Walton
*Absent Presence (VCA)* 2014
Interactive projection installation

**Image 58 - 61.**
Yandell Walton
*Inner View (lightboxes)* 2014
Photographic prints on Duratran in metal light boxes

**Image 62.**
Yandell Walton
*Inner View (video)* 2014
Looped video projection

**DVD 1.**
Video documentation of works presented at graduate exhibition and as part of the candidacy
*The Home*, 2014
*Inner View (video)*, 2014
*Absent Presence (Townsville)*, 2014
*Transition*, 2013
*Impermanence*, 2014
*Presence*, 2014
*Remains*, 2013
*Journey Duchess of Spring St.*, 2013
Image 47 & 48. Yandell Walton, The Home
Image 50. Yandell Walton, Transition, 2013, Projection
Image 54, 55, 56 & 57. Yandell Walton, Absent Presence (VCA), 2014, Interactive projection installation
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