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SUSPENDED STATES: THE LOGIC OF RITUAL

By
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October 2013
Statement

This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.
Contents

6. List of Illustrations
9. Abstract
10. Foreword
14. Introduction
20. Chapter 1
29. Chapter 2
43. Chapter 3
61. Conclusion
66. Appendix: Excerpt from Professor Phillipa Hay
68. Bibliography
77. Catalogue of Work for Examination
80. List of Images
List of Illustrations

Figure 1
Promotional Poster For Batman: The Dark Knight, 2008

Figure 2.
Heath Ledger portraying The Joker
Film Still from Batman: The Dark Knight, 2008

Figure 3
Louise Bourgeois
*Insomnia Drawings* Nov 1994-June 1995
220 images, dimensions variable

Figure 4
Louise Bourgeois
*Insomnia Drawing No. 197*, April 10, 1995
Watercolour and felt-tip pen on music paper 21.3x30.5 cm

Figure 5
Louise Bourgeois
*Insomnia Drawing No. 115*, 27 January 1995
Watercolour on Cardboard, 22.9 x 30.2 cm

Figure 6
Willem de Kooning
*Landscape at Stanton Street*, 1971
Lithograph on paper, 65 x 48.5 cm
Figure 7  
**Andre Masson**  
*Automatic Drawing*, 1924  
Ink on paper, 23.5 x 20.6 cm

Figure 8  
**Robert Motherwell**  
*Automatism A*, 1955-56  
Lithograph, 71 x 54 cm

Figure 9  
**Hans Namuth**  
*Jackson Pollock painting Autumn Rhythm*, 1950  
Photograph

Figure 10  
**Jackson Pollock**  
*Full Fathom Five (detail)*,  
Oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, key, coins, cigarettes, matches etc., 129.2 x 76.5 cm

Figure 11  
**Dianne McClaughlin**  
*Blowing Breath*, 2013  
Clothes dye and bubble solution on high resolution paper, 21 x 29 cm

Figure 12  
**Dianne McClaughlin**  
*Carved Breath*, 2013  
Papercut giclee print, 84 x 119 cm

Figure 13  
**Yayoi Kusama**  
*The Obliteration Room*, 2011  
Installation at The Queensland Art Gallery, dimensions variable

Figure 14  
**Yayoi Kusama**  
*No. F*, 1959  
Oil on canvas, 105.4 x 132.1 cm

Figure 15  
Wolfgang Laib preparing *Milkstone*, 1987-88
Figure 16
Wolfgang Laib
Brahmanda, Stone for Rumi, 1972
Pink Marble

Figure 17
Yayoi Kusama
Net Infinity - TW20, 2004
acrylic on canvas, 80.3 × 100cm

Figure 18
Wolfgang Laib preparing a Milkstone, 1999

Figure 19
Wolfgang Laib
Brahmanda, 2011
Black granite and oil, 21.2" x 21.2" x 37.4"

Figure 20
Dianne McClaughlin
Reality Tracing, Molly, 2003
Permanent marker on acetate, 50 x 35 cm

Figure 21
Dianne McClaughlin
Papercut Stencil for One Fish Swimming, 2007
One of Eighty stencils required for the work, dimensions variable

Figure 22
Dianne McClaughlin
Ant, 2005
Screenprint on Hahnemühle paper, 78 x 105 cm

Figure 23
Raw digital photograph of the ant

Figure 24
Dianne McClaughlin
Ant series (details), 2005
Screenprint on Hahnemühle paper, 78 x 105 cm
Abstract

Research Paper

My Research Paper is concerned with the employment of art as tool for the reconnection of the body to consciousness. Output as artwork becomes the surrogate proof of existence in real (tangible) time and space.

My research has been directed by highlighting Insomnia as an example of the Altered State of Consciousness and the methods with which this state is subdued or overcome. In the paper I relate to this through the ritualization of behaviours as coping mechanisms and therefore inducing a sense of security within the participant. This is then examined further in relation to the making of objects as concrete element of phenomenological space.

Creative work

The studio work that has been produced throughout my candidature is focussed upon the affirmation of self as physical entity.

The work serves as residue of the ritualization of safety inducing behaviours. The residue as work serves as surrogate for Self and physically habituates the defined space in which the Self is felt to absolve.
Foreword
November 4th, 2009

I ached through my bones from exhaustion and as I watched this woman as she approached me I thought....“that must be her.”

I sat wide eyed but certainly not bushy tailed while this woman surveyed my every move. I sat beside her desk facing her but not daring to make eye contact. I could feel her eyes as they moved over my frame, observing and analysing.

I could see her smiling and telling me that I was ok, I didn’t need to be rushed to hospital.

Then the real purpose of my presence there was inescapable as she turned to her computer and began to read off the screen, glancing at me sideways as she went.

“Often people with this condition show these physical symptoms....” She rattled them off checking for my response either verbally or bodily. My body deceived me so many times on that day, exposing my secrets through reactionary twitches.

It was so hard to hear her. I could see her speaking and yet so many words just seemed to float away. Something in me just didn’t want to hear her. I knew that I had come here for a purpose and I had to honour that. So I focussed really hard to concentrate the movements into sounds and then the sounds into words.

“Can you identify with these things?”
“Yes”
And then it came.....
“People with an eating disorder also show these symptoms.....”
Again she talked through a list on the screen, except this time it wasn’t about physical effects of ‘the illness’, she sat straight faced and read out the characteristics of my personality. She termed them psychological symptoms. No they’re not, that’s me you’re speaking about. I looked at her monitor screen. The page that she was reading from had watermarks, resource links and internet addresses and looked REALLY official. What is she saying? Find the words again.
“Can you relate to these things?”
I wanted to scream and smash anything I could reach
“Of course I can, you just described me. How did you get so much information? Who betrayed me?!”

But I didn’t.
I nodded and sat quietly while she spoke about what needed to be done before the next session. Blood tests, bone scans and journal everything, then return in a week.
That was intrusive enough but as I left that office that day I remember
walking through the main street acutely aware that everything that I related
to as my Self had just been reduced to symptoms of a mental illness. My
known “I” had a diagnosis; EDNOS, that is an Eating Disorder Not
Otherwise Specified, presenting as clinical depression and anxiety,
according to clinical criteria, spanning over a history of nearly twenty years.

Everything that I knew about myself, how I related to myself, who I was....it
was wrong. I was wrong. Not even just that, I was broken and something
that needed to be fixed and had been for a very long time.

After the confusion, the denial and the pure rage came the first time that I
questioned the thoughts that drove my behaviours, the manner in which the
Eating Disorder manifests itself in me. Questioning the behaviours however
has been nowhere near as difficult as challenging them. Within the Eating
Disorder community there is a common acknowledgement of the ED self, an
alter that dominates the true self. I have called the ED in me “The Joker”. It
was in the Batman movie The Dark Knight that I first recognized the
characteristics of the ED in Heath Ledger’s portrayal of The Joker.

Figure 1
Promotional Poster For Batman: The Dark Knight, 2008
“You won’t kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won’t kill you, because you are just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever.”

The relationship between myself and The Joker is extremely complicated. Whilst I now am able to recognise this entity as separate to my “I”, I still feel powerless against the demands which are dictated to me through him. This compulsion to behave in ways that I can see are not conducive to what the true me desires is expressed through the ritualization of behaviours, thoughts and patterns that are performed and re-enacted to very strict prerequisites. They exist as a “coping mechanism” but are vital for me to function. To counteract this, as a form of self-affirmation, I make. I have a craving, an absolute need, to prove to myself that I exist. Even in the years that were completely dominated by the ED I felt a need to substantiate my existence as physical at the very least. I need reassurance of my place within the arena of physicality as I am constantly questioning my existence as a conscious being as opposed to operating as The Joker in my skin.

Figure 2.
Heath Ledger portraying The Joker
Film Still from Batman: The Dark Knight, 2008

From the experience of being fully aware of being me and yet not being me, being absent in my own presence and knowing that somewhere underneath my skin there is another me I am compelled to make, manipulate and mark. I need to not just recover my true ‘I’, through means of making I am able to discover her.

Introduction

Trace the line, don’t listen to the ranting, let him yell. Just focus. Observe the flow of the line, let everything around you, inside you, beyond you dissolve. Track the undulating path, absorb into it, be absorbed by it. Let the line possess and dominate your thoughts, your actions, your entirety. It’s safe, it’s ok. Trace the line. Trailing....Up and to the left then gently sweeping down and around. Don’t miss that kink there, follow it down. Adhere to its presence. Let it dictate your movements. That part there loops through- don’t go too far or it will break. Outline that path forged by breathe. Observe the marks made in your physical exertion. Trace the line, pursue it and be guided by it...
The manner in which we feel ourselves to exist, as real, tactile, living and breathing beings is what I directly relate to as being consciously aware of Self. Assured of physicality, the corporeal self is a container for the cognitive self, producing what is essentially a wholistic being. It’s in the instance that the entities do not align or are even internally perceived as relating that alienation occurs: alienation between all versions of Selves. Under the guise of Cartesian Dualism the Self as an entirety is fractured into separate and distinct properties which are then treated as such. Despite the physical body remaining constant, the Selves underneath are fluctuating and dynamic.

This sense of possessing a radically different Self from that which is perceived or to be cognitively acknowledged as the true Self parallels the research undertaken into the Altered State of Consciousness. The altered state presents with numerous observable shifts from an external and internal perspective of the individual experiencing the altered state. Primarily the individual reports feelings of loss of control and alterations in thinking; concentration, attention, memory and judgement are impaired as opposed to the individual’s normative cognitive state. Perceptions of time, the importance of phrases and objects and a sense of depersonalization (schism between body and mind) are all common attributes of the experience of an altered state. Georg Lukacs described the inhabitance of the altered state as ‘transcendental homelessness’.

“a form of absolute (though reversible) alienation from the self, from society, and (the source of all other forms of alienations) from “immanent totality” - a phrase that denotes the effortless awareness of meaning and purpose, the complete correspondence of personal desire and cosmos, the presence of secular grace. The most basic form transcendental homelessness can take is discomfort with the most visible part of self, the body.”

The Self is the foundation of the awareness and therefore the level of engagement, in the relationship that one is able to pursue with the environment, society and culture. John Locke’s exploration of self-predication as a basis of self-knowledge expands upon the use of ‘I’ as

2. TORGOVNICK, Marianna. Chapter 12. Physicality, pp227-8
3. Ibid.
The very use of ‘I’ is “immune to error through misidentification- I cannot fail to identify myself when I use the word ‘I’ even though I could be mistaken about my beliefs.”

This phrase highlights the incongruities that are possible between the objective self and the subjective self. The objective self refers to the human ‘I’, the ‘I’ of physicality that is projected in public. This is the ‘I’ as existing in a specific time and place, concrete and substantiated by interaction with the society and environment of habitation. However, the subjective self refers to the phenomenal ‘I’ or the self that is private and internally considered. This is the ‘I’ of what is considered to be the motivation behind an individual’s thoughts and desires, the psychological and abstract self.

In Chapter One I consider the nature of consciousness and the position of the Self when the experience of consciousness is altered. The altered state of consciousness as expressed by Arnold M Ludwig consists of an experience that can be subjectively recognized by the individual himself, or by an objective observer, as radically different from that which is experienced in the individual’s normal waking state. Ludwig has composed a selection of five groups that compose the causes of altered states of consciousness. They consist of:

1. The reduction in exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity, as in isolation or confinement,
2. An increased alertness or mental involvement, as in ceremonial activities,
3. A dramatic decrease of alertness or relaxation of critical faculties,
4. Somatopsychological factors,
5. Changes in body chemistry whether through natural and spontaneous avenues (hormonal) or induced instances (pharmacological devices).

These various methods result in an altered state of consciousness in which the individual may experience alterations in thinking, disturbed time sense, loss of control, change in emotional expression, body image change, perceptual distortions, changes in meaning/significance of experience, a feeling of rejuvenation, hypersuggestibility and a sense of the ineffable. These states are not exclusive as they are able to be experienced in meditative, hypnagogic and dream states, also with the assistance of hypnosis and any psychedelic drugs.

This investigation is then furthered into the manner in which self can be expressed through ritualized behaviours when the I of the individual is unknown in a cognitive sense.

The development of ritualistic behaviours enables the individual to engage with the physical environment whilst also creating a psychologically coherent environment between the subjective and objective existence of the self as experienced in the altered state. For ease of definition I shall term the extended altered state as a suspended state. That is, a state of consciousness in which the conscious self is either repressed or perceived as a threat to the altered state of consciousness.

The definition of suspension relates to two primary sets of criteria;

1. That of absorption in the act of creation- that is the ‘suspension’ of the surrounding environment.

2. Episodic ‘breaks’ from a concurrent reality, facing a radically alternative world view or method of functioning within the world-encountering a cognitive/psychical ‘suspension’.

The development of the suspended state within an individual signifies a deep break between the belief of what is considered to be real according to their personal perspective and that which can be observed as objectively real. This in turn magnifies and extends the gulf between self as subject and self as object that is familiar with the experience of an altered state. In order to explore this I will discuss Insomnia as metaphor of the suspended state of being. The insomniatic state parallels that of the suspended state. Both emphasise a radical sense of disillusionment and disconnection as a prolonged experience. In considering the somatopsychological ramifications of insomnia upon the individual I will highlight the
connection between a secure sense of self and the process of cognitive identification.

In Chapter Two the emphasis between cognitive self and corporeal self will then move into the discussion of the practical application of ritualized behaviours in establishing an ‘I’ within the suspended state. The exploration of ritualized behaviours extends from the traditional tribal connotations of ritual into contemporary use of behaviours that are purposefully and repetitively produced in accordance with the investigation of consciousness and self.

The imposed constraints of ritualization permit the movements, as means of exploring and identifying with physicality, to demonstrate the use of behaviour in establishing a source of security within the work of Louise Bourgeois and the Insomnia Drawings suite. The process of physically transcribing the repetitive gestures leads into the importance of graphic mark-making in signifying and substantiating a corporeal self as site of existence.

The exploration of the graphic mark as residue of the physical self yet in direct connection with the conscious self is evident in the work of the American Action painters, in particular the infamous drip gesticulations of Jackson Pollock. The American Action Painters sought to produce imagery that directly transposed the physical action of manipulating the medium evident in the making process. This investigation shall also consider the work of the Surrealist Automatists in the pursuit of an image that sought to engage disengagement. Through various methods of inducing an Altered State the Surreal Automatists attempted to portray figuratively the experience of detachment from the normal waking self. Opposed to the structuralist and formalist conditions with which they were surrounded, Surrealist Automatists pursued the image as residue of experience, allowing the image through signs, symbols and methods of engagement with the work to represent the state in which it was produced.

After beginning the discussion concerning the practical applications of transforming the Suspended State from a phenomenological experience into a concrete element I shall use Chapter Three to consider how this research has culminated and can therefore be demonstrated within my personal art making practice. In my own work I explore my personal existence and
persistence through the exploitation of my breath. My breath substitutes the gesture as expressed in the work of the Surrealist Automatists or American Action Painters. The residue of my breath in the work holds the surrogacy of my entire being. It contains not only the projection of the state in which the marks were made but also serves as cognitive substantiation of my physical being. Through exposing the tangible aspects of my breath I am able to journey through the solidification of my interior territory as an external account as to the existence of my Self as a whole. My rationale and the determining projector of my research is to establish a tangible method that could unequivocally denote self-actuality, unlike photography that provides a fickle account of actuality I want to portray my ‘I’ rather than my image.

The use of my breath as foundation for the image and the process of paper cutting affirms the residue of my breath to be classified as object. As image, my breath exists separately unto itself, mappable and discrete in proportions, it is entirely derived from the ritual of impregnating fibres with the stain of my Self.

Chapter Three relates the work of Yayoi Kusama and Wolfgang Laib to my own approach to making. Yayoi Kusama serves to demonstrate the connection between ritual and making as extension of the ritual. The Obliteration Room and Kusama’s long standing focus upon the thematics of the Infinity Net series exemplify Kusama’s continual visitation of the act of making as primary consideration in the execution of the work. The use of Kusama furthers this investigation as she herself has stated that the compulsion to portray polkadots originates from an Altered State experience held by Kusama as a young girl. Wolfgang Laib displays the connection again of ritual and objecthood. Laib has long been associated with totemic images and an investigation into spirituality as a tangible form. Through the discussion of works such as Brahmanda and Milkstones in relation to the aforementioned work of Kusama I will establish a contemporary theoretical demonstration of the pursuit of image or object as residue of the ritualized experience.
Feeling connected to me, seeing my hand and knowing that it is connected to my body...Knowing that if I were to pierce the skin of this hand, it is my blood that I would be covered in. This is my traditional acknowledgement of my physical presence. My physicality has been something to be conquered through sheer will. Something to be tested, partly to push myself further and therefore achieve greater depths of self-discipline, partly to ensure “I” am still an entity. If I cut my hand and I feel pain, I must be real because pain is real.

Existing in a hovering state, not here and not gone, Not alive and yet not dead. There is a very distinct separation from my selves. I cannot trust my thoughts to be my own. The thoughts that echo my desires and that spur me towards goals that I believe are important have sabotaged my very existence. Yet still, all I can do to pacify these thoughts is to behave accordingly and obey the dictated rituals that would lead me to my ultimate desire. It isn’t until the desire to disappear becomes so much more important than the desire to exist that my true self begins to show. For now, for right now, trace the line....
As a physical entity consciousness simply does not exist, not as a single definable point within the human biological structure. Neural Imaging scans have failed to trace any particular pattern of stimulation and activity within self-directed cognition. Daniel Dennett has asserted that in line with neuroscience imaging investigations, it is more correct to consider consciousness as “multiple drafts undergoing constant ‘editorial revision’” as there is no established single neurological region that is responsible for the manifestation and maintenance of the human consciousness.

Clinical approaches to registering consciousness rely heavily upon a series of standardized neurobehavioural assessment measures.

“Although item content varies across measures, all evaluate behavioural responses to a variety of auditory, visual, motor and communication prompts.”

The clinical view of consciousness is as something that, whilst abstract in definition, exists as foundation for an individual’s physical and cognitive behaviours. The presence of this determines the individual’s ability to respond and interact in a meaningful manner with themselves and the environment that they are surrounded by.

If the clinical definition of consciousness accounts for the drive behind ones thoughts and behaviours, what then defines the realm of consciousness according to a phenomenological approach? Philosophical discourse concerned with consciousness as an entity parallel with the notion of the Self. Both Self as subject and Self as object.

“Phenomenally, I know what it is like to be me, and no one else can have my phenomenal awareness of my self. My self and my awareness of myself seem essentially intertwined.”

Consciousness bears the weight of what it is to exist. It is the site of what can be termed the I of an individual. The epicentre and axis of all that makes that individual unique and the basis of the individual’s sense of what it is to be human. John Locke has expressed this link:

6. GIACINO, J.T. The Minimally Conscious State: defining the borders of consciousness, p390
7. KRIEGEL, Uriah; in LIU, JeeLoo. Consciousness and the Self, p7.
“For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being, and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done.”

Locke states that self-awareness involves an understanding of the existence of a psychological persistence of self throughout personal history, a diachronic unity of the self within all conscious moments. That is, since birth, the I, or the self of that individual has essentially remained constant. It is the psychological constancy of the individual that distinguishes the self of the individual from the self of all other conscious beings.

Sydney Shoemaker furthers the discourse on self-awareness with the consideration of the use of self-identification.

“’I’ refers to the subject of statements and each person’s system of reference has the person himself as an ‘anchoring point.’”

The ‘I’ of an individual, as an extension of consciousness remains susceptible to misidentification through values and beliefs. The ‘anchoring point’ of an individual’s behaviours and cognitive awareness is unmistakeably one that relies upon a foundation of self-knowledge. In the Altered State however the relationship is compromised via questionable self-awareness. How does one then express and interact with a world that seems radically different to their individual sense of reality.

An altered state of consciousness is not excluded to permanent mental disturbance rather it is capable of being induced through numerous natural and pharmacological methods and rituals. When one exists within an altered state of consciousness the method in which one is able to interact with the environment in a meaningful manner must also shift.

8. LOCKE, John 1975, p.335.
9. SHOEMAKER, Sydney 1968, p.567
“For any given individual, his normal state of consciousness is the one in which he spends most of his waking hours. That your normal state of consciousness and mine are quite similar to that of all normal men is an almost universal assumption, albeit one of questionable validity. An altered state for a given individual is one in which he clearly feels a qualitative shift in his pattern of mental functioning, that is, he feels not just a quantitative shift (more or less alert, more or less visual imagery, sharper or duller, etc.) but also that some quality or qualities of his mental processes are different.”

The altered state is one in which the individual is able to identify a disturbance within their personal equilibrium. This may be the result of psychosis or as aforementioned rituals and substances to enhance the sense of disconnection with self. As a species, we are now able to research anthropologically the universal human phenomena of exploitation and fear of the altered state of consciousness culminating in a method of self-realization. Within tribal cultures those effected with such attributes or experiences were often designated as unique and given a status that exists on the borderline of societal acceptance. Possession, self-induced trances, visionary states and delirium were hailed as culturally significant and reflected in the cultures use of religion and mythology and as a consequence, the rituals contained therein. The difficulty in portraying or relaying the effects of the altered state by those affected further heightens the importance of the individual within the cultural society. Current research concerning the experience of the altered state parallels that of the anthropological documentation.

The induction of an altered state brings about a sense of dissociation between the individual’s sense of self and the environmental setting in which they exist. Under the influence of an altered state of consciousness it then follows that the individual’s sense of self is also altered. If the self is the foundation of the thoughts and desires of the individual it leads to questioning as to what determines the behavioural characteristics of the individual whilst in the altered state, particularly considering that the individual experiences this state as subjective reality. The internalised experience becomes perceived as the truth or sense of guidance.

10. TART, Charles T., Altered States of Consciousness. 1969
In situations where external guidance or structure is ambiguous

“...the person’s internal mental productions tend to become his major guide for reality and play a large role in determining behaviour. In these instances, he is much more susceptible to the dictates of his emotions and the fantasies and thoughts associated with them than to the direction of others.”

In such instances functionality of the individual reduces to the participation in ritual as defined by A.F.C. Wallace. That is, of relating to behaviour considered beyond that which is ‘necessary’ to survival based activities, characteristically performed with

“mechanical stereotyped repetitiveness. The primary function of such behaviour is the use of energy to communicate, yet it is “communication without information.” That is, because of its stereotypical nature, ritual behaviour is totally predictable,...it does convey two kinds of meaning: a statement of intention and a ‘statement of the nature of the world in which the intention is to be realized.’ Specifically, ritual conveys the ‘image of a simple and orderly world.’”

It has been my personal experience that whilst existing in an altered state the repressed or disconnected conscious individual remains ‘intact’ beneath the projected state, just as psychological constancy accounts for the persistence of self as an individual throughout growth. The self remains present, albeit smothered or disregarded.

Insomnia as the experience of an alternate state greatly serves to exemplify the analogy of consciousness: normative consciousness as being fully awake as opposed to wakefulness, as being absent in consciousness yet present in physicality. Unlike the conscious waking state that is experienced in the daylight hours, wakefulness belongs to the nocturnal realm. It is the position of encountering vigilance beyond attentiveness, as being present in the form of absence.

11. BOURGIGNON, Erika. Altered States of Consciousness, Myths and Rituals, p.18
12. Ibid.
To explore this idea further I will draw parallels between the description of the dream self and waking self in the work of Maurice Blanchot with Emmanuel Levinas’s investigation into sleep and its effect upon the conscious mind.

First, in order to explore the intricacies of the condition of insomnia it is necessary to consider that which the lack of defines the condition itself, sleep. The importance of sleep upon the human consciousness is immense. It allows the body to enter into a sort of mini death that must be performed in order for the body to function. Indeed sleep deprivation is a common comorbidity associated with many cognitive, emotional and physical difficulties.

“Sleep is a naturally recurring state characterized by reduced or absent consciousness, relatively suspended sensory activity, and inactivity of nearly all involuntary muscles” 13

Sleep serves to restore the body. The very experience of sleep regulates the natural physiological fluctuations according to the circadian rhythms. However, as noted above, sleep does more than to refresh physicality, it allows a space of respite in which the body as well as mind are able to rejuvenate following diurnal activities. The existence of sleep serves purely to enable the utilization of the daylight. Sleep’s primary purpose is to attend to the day.

“We surrender to sleep, but in the way that the master entrusts himself to the slave that serves him” 14

In the work of Emmanuel Levinas sleep is the foundation from which all existence proceeds. It “re-establishes a relationship with place qua base….This surrender to a base which also offers refuge constitutes sleep.” 15 This sentiment is again echoed by Blanchot in his consideration of Henri Bergson in 'Sleep, Night':

13. WORTHAM, Simon Morgan. L’ Arrêt de mort, Insomnia, Dreaming, Sleep: Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas
15. WORTHAM, Simon Morgan. L’ Arrêt de mort, Insomnia, Dreaming, Sleep: Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas
“Bergson saw behind the totality of conscious life minus the effort of concentration. On the contrary, sleep is intimacy with the center. I am, not dispersed, but entirely gathered together where I am, in this spot which is my position and where the world, because of the firmness of my attachment, localizes itself. Where I sleep, I fix myself and I fix the world.....My person is not simply situated where I sleep; it is this very site, and my sleeping is the fact that now my abode is my being.” 16

Far from being a state of stagnation, for Levinas, sleep is considered as an action. It is from the base that sleep provides, that is the restorative effect of sleep, that consciousness, as the state of being wholly present and aware of one’s own sensations, cognitions and surroundings, is permitted.

“....sleep- nothing other than sleep- defines the very conditions of possibility of consciousness. Without sleep there would be no consciousness, no awakening to the ‘day’. Consciousness finds its starting point- it locates itself,...through nothing less than sleep.”17

Just as night, the realm to which sleep is designated, is the radical alternate to the day, sleep is able to be construed as the alter, the Other to consciousness. The domain of sleep has long been associated with the presence of dreams. Freudian investigations into the psychoanalytical functions of dreaming as the free expression of the unconscious mind draws parallels between the waking state as the conscious mind and the dream state as the domain of the unconscious mind. The unconscious desires of the individual and connections that have been formed throughout the day are able to be approached and enacted to satisfy any accidental cognitive disturbances that have been enabled.

Considering the importance of sleep and its impact upon the functional capabilities of the individual, where then does one receive this restorative function when under the influence of extreme sleep deprivation. Insomnia is categorically defined as difficulty in attaining and maintaining sleep.

16. Blanchot, 1989, p.266
17. WORTHAM, Simon Morgan. L’ Arrêt de mort, Insomnia, Dreaming, Sleep: Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas
Without the benefits towards survival that sleep underscores, fatigue impacts upon the cognitive, emotional and physical effects of the insomniac. Physical manifestations of the condition intrude upon diurnal activities. Physically the individual suffers from the muscular fatigue and cognitive impairment of not attaining enough rest. The mind is more susceptible to visual anomalies such as double vision, the impression of moving faster than the environment around them and hallucinations. Insomnia produces in the individual a need to develop a new approach to functioning within the world.

The insomniatic condition greatly affects the connection with the conscious self, producing in the individual a state of half awareness. As a result the insomniac's world view is directly altered- particularly throughout the night, in moments in which the individual is most affected.

Just as sleep's primary function is to fulfill the day, the experience of insomnia permits the day to pervade the night. Yet the consciousness that is afforded during the waking hours does not parallel that which is felt in the night time dominion. The insomniac though awake must also, physiologically, be in a state of recuperation. In order to achieve this, the mind enters into a state of semi-consciousness, a state of vigilance beyond attentiveness. Levinas denotes this nocturnal horror prior to the emergence of consciousness as the *il y a* (*there is*). It is the "irremissibility of pure existing" that is conceived of as "radically prior or excessive in regard to any form of existent being." 18

On the experience of insomnia Levinas writes:

"The impossibility of rending the invading, inevitable, and anonymous rustling of existence manifests itself particularly in certain times when sleep evades our appeal. One watches on when there is nothing to watch and despite the absence of any reason for remaining watchful. The bare fact of presence is oppressive; one is held by being, held to be. One is detached from any object, any content, yet there is presence. This presence which arises behind nothingness is neither a *being*, nor consciousness 18.

18. WORTHAM, Simon Morgan. L’Arrêt de mort, Insomnia, Dreaming, Sleep: Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas
functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the there is, which encompasses things and consciousness.”

It is evident throughout this passage the alienating intrusiveness of insomnia. The sense of being awake and yet not alert, the pervading impression of presence among simultaneous and overwhelming absence. The insomniatic-self mimics the appearance of the waking self and yet is unable to fulfil the conscious state that the waking-self possesses. There is a void between these ‘I’s in that though they may present similar characteristics they function within distinct economies as though in parallel universes. The ‘I’ of insomnia is an ‘I’ that is at once familiar and distant. This position of inhabiting a self which is and yet is not the self of ordinary consciousness correlates with the radical alternative positing of day and night, consciousness and vigilance beyond attentiveness, presence and absence, the self and the other. Within each of these dichotomies each referential exists in independence and yet linked to its polar opposite.

Insomnia enables and burdens the individual with the accessibility to the ‘other night’- The ‘other night’ that coincides simultaneously with the night of darkness and yet does not provide any of the respite that the night inherently promises. It is a period of ‘wakefulness’ that is, vigilance beyond attentiveness. Wakefulness as explored by Levinas verges on consciousness and yet consciousness eludes it. It is the inhabitation of a borderline existence just as it is to be within the Altered State.

19. Levinas, 2001, p.61
Chapter Two

Sometimes the yelling in my head just gets too loud. Sometimes all I can do to exist is move. To move, physically...drown out the sound of the yelling...I cannot shout louder than it but I can move and it cannot. It is trapped inside my head and when movement through space is the last power invested to my corporeal self it is what I MUST do. I must move over and over and over until it calms down and settles again. Until it quietens enough that I can be still.

Nothing satisfies either this dictator self or assure my true self like feeling the movement of my form and seeing the trace of my movement. Trace the line. Hunt it and consume it. Be free within the lines predetermined delineations. Just trace the line...
The body as a site of physical self is inherently connected with the politics of identity. It is the public signifier that distinguishes "This is me", "I am here" or, particularly in photographs, "I was there". The body is the vessel of the characteristics and attributes that culminate to make the "I’ that I know myself to be, the arena in which the dynamics of the Self play out. The presence of the suspended state as defined earlier, interferes with this recognition of the physical, bodily Self as parallel with that of the cognitive Self. The conscious Self is detached and does not identify itself with the body that it inhabits.

The rupture in Selves is a cause of great distress and anxiety for the individual experiencing the altered state. The individual must seek strategies for managing the distress in order to avoid psychological conflict. It is in these times that it is common for the insomniac to seek a sense of calm.

For Louise Bourgeois it was in these times that she felt the need to address the psychological disturbance that interrupted her sleep by soothing it into a state of silence. Bourgeois’ diurnal art process worked at wrenching through her psychic arena and extracting the trauma within. She did not attempt to escape this psychical realm but rather embraced it as her main source of creativity. Bourgeois’ daylight work directly connected the physical and psychical realm consequently exposing the psychological image as object.

In stark contrast to the method of attacking and scrutinizing that Bourgeois employed in her primary work, the "Insomnia Drawings" are a deliberate means of achieving a sense of cognitive peace.

The entire production of the drawings; the scribbling of text, the frantic and yet methodical application of media and the imagery that arises from this semi-conscious state are all designed to ease her mind from the anxiety and obsessive nature with which it ruminated. The act of creation of these drawings provides Bourgeois with a sense of security and comfort, much like the safety found in the predetermined rules of geometry and mathematics. It is ordered and controllable, reliable and predictable, in direct opposition with the nervous antics of her psychical space.
“It’s that anxiety is then transformed into something specific, as specific as a drawing. Then you have access to it, you can deal with it, because it has gone from the unconscious to the conscious, which is fear. So my work is really about the elimination of fears.” 20

This drive for the externalization of anxiety as a gesture, as ink across a page, echoes the tribal use of symbolic idolatry. Purposefully seeking to quell anxiety or fear through adapting the unknown mythical world into “organisable and measurable forces” 21, consequentially reducing the metaphysical spiritual realm to the known order of physicality. Research conducted through the fields of psychiatry and psychology has investigated the cognitive application of reason and rationality.

20. BOURGEOIS, Louise, Interview with Cecilia Blomberg, Oct. 16, 1998
“Research revealed that man was far more motivated by the dark regions of these primordial beginnings of life....the real powers behind the human personality, and reason was simply a convention, giving man the illusion of order and of consciousness, so that his conscience and self-respect could be placated in his servility to these abysmal forces. (Fears)...have been reinstated into the world of reality and have come to be considered the basic sources of human action”. 22

In the Altered State experienced in an insomniatic episode the compulsion to perform tasks which soothe and comfort the insomniac is driven not through the desire to remain in the Altered State but rather as a means of escaping the Altered State and entering the world of slumber. The fear and anxiety associated with Insomnia are reciprocal to the primary symptom of Insomnia itself, the inability to sleep or extreme difficulty in establishing sleep. The only means to interrupt this cycle is by establishing a ritual that induces a state of psychical peace and therefore allows for physical peace to follow. What I am referring to here goes beyond what is considered to be routine. Routines are easily established. They are generally flexible and the lack of performing the routine does not induce a sense of anxiety or panic within the individual. What I am speaking of is ritual behaviours that are established in order to function. Performing the act of ritual invites a sense of calm to the participant and provides assurance and comfort in the system of beliefs with which it is performed.

As Bourgeois demonstrates in the Insomnia Drawings series, the restriction of tools to single sheets with blue, black or red ink highly simplifies the process. Rules are firmly set in place therefore reducing the amount of decisions that can cause chaos in the process of psychical exploration.

22. TART, Charles T., Altered States of Consciousness.1969
Much like autonomous writing the purpose of the work is not to dictate what image emerges when, where and how. Rather it is a tool for allowing the free movement of the pen on the paper, the repetition of the circular form and the prose, which exist purely to calm Bourgeois’ mind and lull her to sleep.

The implementation of a strict set of instructions to the process of making allows a space in which Bourgeois is able to be free. It is within the controlled boundaries that the chaos of the insomniatic state can be quelled. It is the very repetition within restrictions that designates the insomnia drawing series as ritualistic. Ritual, as defined by Wallace, consists of “behaviours characterized by mechanical, stereotyped repetitiveness separated from ‘necessary’ activities.” 23 That is, a ritual can be considered as any specific behavioural patterns that do not serve as means for survival and yet there is a power in the re-enactment of said behaviours. The traditional understanding of ritual as ceremonious can then be extended.

23. BOURGIGNON, Erika. Altered States of Consciousness, Myths and Rituals, p.18
It is entirely possible for a ritual to be concealed within a private realm, known only to the individual participating in the behaviours. This does not in any way degrade the importance of the actions, it emphasises the extremely sacred nature of the behaviours upon the individual and their personal relationship with them and in turn how the behaviours relate to the individuals sense of self. The very exposition and questioning of the ritualistic behaviours, when such effort has been expended to retain the secrecy, intrudes upon the individuals understanding of self through the violation of the sacred bond between participant and ritualised behaviour.

Figure 5

**Louise Bourgeois**

*Insomnia Drawing No. 115, 27 January 1995*

Watercolour on Cardboard, 22.9 x 30.2 cm

The predominant trait within ritualized behaviour is the desire to communicate, whether as an external (public) communication, as in the ceremonial ritual, or in the private ritual as a means of internal communication.
Ultimately, Wallace’s definition of ritual as “communication without information,” 24 due to the predictability of the repetitive nature of ritualized behaviours concedes that the function of ritual is to induce comfort, security and a sense of protection, “the image of a simple and orderly world.” 25

The performance of the ritual essentially reduces the complicated world of experience into an orderly world of symbols. Art, as a vastly generalized overarching term, has at its core the purpose of communication. Mark Rothko has argued that the creation of art is survivalistic in that it is driven by the satisfaction of personal needs, as though it were a part of basic humanistic biological function. Rothko however has confused the definition of survival with thriving. A fundamental difference in that whilst our lives would be experientially and communicatively poorer were it not there, it is possible to exist in a world without external imagery.

Art, especially making, contributes to the advancement of the self in existentialist terms. It provides a platform with which to communicate that which cannot be seen or which cannot be sufficiently expressed or interpreted by words. Considering this, the making of art as a continued pursuit is, in itself, able to be interpreted as ritualistic.

Bourgeois’ entanglement in the motion, whether in a long sweeping arc or tight and constricted forms, consequently marks the surface of the page with the remnants of actions that appear as ritualistic. The ambivalence towards the mark, which then emphasises the movement involved in the production of the mark, echoes the critical writings on Action painting.

In the 1952 article by Harold Rosenberg, ‘The American Action Painters’, Rosenberg describes how the physicality of the artistic pursuit as evident in the work of Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. The gesticulation of the artist in the state of creation is engaged and emphasised in the final image.

24. BOURGIGNON, Erika. Altered States of Consciousness, Myths and Rituals, p.18
25. BOURGIGNON, Erika. Altered States of Consciousness, Myths and Rituals, p.18
“The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.” 26

Figure 6
**Willem de Kooning**

*Landscape at Stanton Street*, 1971
Lithograph on paper, 65 x 48.5 cm

In this sense the canvas transforms into theatre for the artist’s performance.

“With traditional aesthetic references discarded as irrelevant, what gives the canvas its meaning is not psychological data but rôle, the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were in a living situation. The interest lies in the kind of act taking place in the four-sided arena, a dramatic interest” 27

Within the article and the subsequent texts in which Rosenberg reiterated his position, the image, as site of performance was not to be prescribed as one in which detachment takes place for the unconscious to be freely expressed. In the American Action Painters, Rosenberg did not designate that painting was anything more than a site in which the physical movements of the artists hand could be retraced, reimagined and recreated. It is the correlation between Surrealist Automatism and the ‘capturing’ of the moment in movement as image that reads the Action painters into the dialogue with unconscious engagement. With the emphasis upon the dramatic, the evidence of the hand, the muscular force, or lack of, as detected in the definition of the mark that remains, imparts a communicable knowledge to the spectator. In front of this material, I did this and it made this.

Surrealist Automatism, in which the artist purposefully avoids cognitive censorship as interference with unconscious communication, furthers the image as forensically linked with the mark of the physical being. It connects the production of the image with the unconscious, or, as designated within Surrealist theory, the subconscious realm. The subconscious realm, the foundation of cognition, is a site of mystery and yet remains a constant source of investigation. Sigmund Freud, as the popular impetus for theoretical discourse surrounding the subconscious arena, encouraged the use of free association- a verbal technique in which participants respond to a cue. The cue, a single word, is the foundation for the responder’s reaction as an immediate verbalisation before the censorship of conscious thought. This psychoanalytically based method was aimed at bypassing
consciousness of the individual and therefore allowing the communication with the subconscious, the ‘true self’ of the individual.

Within the canvas or image as frame of reference the language of action is able to portray the individual artist’s truth. As in philosophy, all perceptions of truth, of universality and eternity, are combined into a single coherent system. Through the manipulation of the elements of plasticity the artist is able to communicate in terms of physicality. This is particularly evident in Modern Art as the ‘objectness’ of an artwork is further considered critical to the overall reading of the image.

“A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a ‘moment’ in the unadulterated mixture of his life- whether ‘moment’ means the actual minutes taken up with spotting the canvas or the entire duration of a lucid drama conducted in sign language. The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist’s existence” 28

Figure 8

Robert Motherwell

*Automatism A*, 1955-56
Lithograph, 71 x 54 cm

The Action Painting image served as remnant of the physical action of the artist. The dialogue between the physicality of the artist’s intentions met the material, with the aim of exploring and exposing the hidden self of the
artist, the resultant object/image was suggested to possess the core qualities of the artist’s identity. The creation of image whilst participating in the induction of an Altered States of Consciousness through sleep deprivation, hallucinogenic pharmacology, and repeated and enforced rhythmic movements or sounds, serves as an exterior expression of the true Self. Within the delirium of an Altered State the ability to create image produces a dichotomy of self-presence. The presence of the physical Self is evident in the ability for tangible manipulation whilst the absence of the conscious Self in the Altered State is shown in the ritualistically based movements characteristically shown within the Altered State. The mark of the physical Self takes on a much greater importance with the introduction of the Suspended state as a prolonged sense of inhabiting the Altered State.

The loss of conscious Self as experienced in the Altered State becomes what is considered normal within the Suspended state. The physical mark, the manipulation of materials as evidentiary in the final image becomes a surrogate for not only the physical presence of the individual being but, due to the absence of Self in the Suspended State, substitutes the entire existence of the individual. The image as object, as proof of existence, becomes the ultimate test of reality. The statement is no longer I was here and I made this but evolves to I am real because I made this and it is real.

Jackson Pollock, as a prime example for the gestural trace expressed the desire to perceive his imagery as a type of communion.

“Painting is a state of being....self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is” 29

It is in the production of image that Pollock was able to negotiate the interactions of the cognitive and corporeal self. In the act of focussing upon the process of the drip method of paint application Pollock had established a set of predetermined rules. Within these boundaries Pollock was able to perceive himself as ‘in’ the picture. This is particularly true in the large scale works which were able to be painted from all edges of the canvas.

29. POLLOCK, Jackson; in Fineberg, 1995, p. 5
The effect of the Altered State as induced through popular methods of Automatism that Pollock had been exposed to through Robert Motherwell, later replaced by the influence of alcohol, narrowed Pollock’s attention in the creation of image. The location of each mark upon the canvas, whilst the result of controlled chaos, influences the way in which it is immediately and definitively responded to with the next mark that Pollock imprinted. This
following mark then designated the circumstances in which the next and every mark thereafter could be made.

![Figure 10](image)

**Jackson Pollock**
*Full Fathom Five (detail)*,
Oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, key, coins, cigarettes, matches etc., 129.2 x 76.5 cm

“Art then, is a definite kind of thing, a species of nature, and like any species in the physical world it proceeds according to definite laws of its own.” 30

The process of plasticity within the arts constitutes it as a language of its own. A language and format that is able to communicate, specifically in the case of Existentialism, where words fail. This is the legacy of the work of the Symbolists, that art is able to transcend the structural and formal elements of the medium and enter the realm of psychic and temporal cognition.

30. ROTHKO, Mark. The Artist’s Reality: Philosophies of Art, p.14
This is my mark. This is me. No one can take this mark, the moment in which I made the mark. Nothing can take that away from me. It is mine, purely mine. My breath makes these shapes, the lines the contours imposed onto the page. It is all derived from my existence.

I need to spend time with me; to find me, to see me, to know me. How do I define who I am when all that I have known me to be is wrong?

I only have what is here now, the marks, the lines that stem from me. Focus and follow what you know. Trace the line...
The journey of breath, the persistence of inhalation and exhalation as a means to allow oxygen to be pumped and infused through the bloodstream of the corporeal self. To breathe is to participate in, encourage and extend one’s physical existence.

As a human, it is a necessity for survival. My breath can only be mine just as another’s can only belong to them. My breath is mine and mine alone. It surfaces from and resides within me and of the ramifications of this breath, primarily it signifies that I am alive. The presence of my breath, as real and uniquely my own, echoes my existence as object of tangible reality, yet it is fleeting and fickle. I can hold my breath, I can push it out of me with a sharp gust and inhale deeply. I can manipulate it to behave in a particular manner, even if only temporarily. It is mine and I can make it perform as I will. What I have no control over however is the way in which my breath performs externally to me. Once my breath has left my body it is an entity unto itself. I cannot dictate the manner in which it atmospherically dissipates, I can only bear witness to its presence within those transient moments. Just as in the externalisation of psychic expression within the work of the Expressionists and Abstract Expressionists, that which was once purely interior and in the possession of my Self, solidifies into a concrete representation of that interiority.

When my breath escapes my form, it professes as to my form as source of origin. It substantiates my physical Self in its culmination. Those that experience the presence of my breath as seen on a cold day, felt as warmth, heard as the passing through my nostrils or mouth, tasted or smelt become primary witnesses as to my presence as an overall entity as my breath does not travel so far as to be detached entirely from my being as a whole. Breath exists as a constant reminder of actuality.

The inhabitance of the Suspended State, as that of prolonged Altered State, provokes a questioning as to the legitimacy of existence. That is, the existence as a being that inhabits and controls a corporeal self as separate and identifiably distinct from all other beings. My work is primarily an investigation into the Cartesian sense of physicality through the exploitation of my breath. It is not about a way of seeing or thinking but rather a way of being, of being undeniably real, and the consequences of my existence as a physical being. The manner that I approach my work however is from a state of not-being. Through the making of the mark, I see my Self.
Making, for me, is a method of becoming acquainted with my true self, paralleling the philosophy of the Symbolist movements in Modern art. The ability to deny or bypass my conscious Self through creating boundaries in which the making can perform, allows for the ritualization of the making state. The predetermined rules allow for the dissociation between Self as a physical being, in which I do not feel that I reside at all, and my conscious being. The process of making becomes detached from thought and analysis and engages in a highly meditative state. The work that is produced in this state becomes a residue of my existence. It represents my tangibility just as line, colour, texture and shapes performed in the dramatic reading of Action painting.

“In painting, the primary agency of physical motion (as distinct from illusionary representation of motions, as with the Futurists) is the line, conceived not as the thinnest of planes, nor as edge, contour or connective but as a stroke or figure (in the sense of ‘figure skating’). In its passage on the canvas each such line can establish the actual movement of the artist’s body as an aesthetic statement. Line, from wiry calligraphy to footwide flaunts of the house painter’s brush, has played the leading part in the technique of Action Painting, though there are other ways besides line of releasing force on canvas.”

By forcing my breath through a choreographed sequence I create a concrete realization of Self as tangible. The exhalation of my breath through a predetermined sequence then impregnates a sheet of paper with the physical formation of that breath. My breath in this ritualistic arena is what permits the image to arrive.

Just as in Action Painting the gestural ‘mark’ in the image represents the direct evidentiary contact by artist as performer. The performance of the ritual of blowing bubbles is prolonged through the cutting of the residual lines. In this manner I am tracing and exploring the objectness of my breath. Paper cutting as a method allows direct contact between my physical self and the medium as “technical support.”

32. KRAUSS, Rosalind E., Perpetual Inventory, 2010
Figure 11

**Dianne McClaughlin**

*Blowing Breath*, 2013

Clothes dye and bubble solution on high resolution paper, 21 x 29 cm

The manner in which I employ paper cutting is very restrained and prescribed and yet there is a certain freedom in knowing that once the cut is made, it is permanent. Through these interactions of printing my breath as form and then tracing it with an absolute line, I become acquainted with my Self as tangible. Once it is cut the two dimensionality of the paper surface transforms into a three dimensional field.
Figure 12

**Dianne Mc Claughlin**  
*Carved Breath, 2013*  
Papercut giclee print, 84 x 119 cm

Shadow interplays and defines areas of the paper as surface, great gaping holes emerge as the form of my printed breath dictates. There is an inescapable correlation between the object and its construction. The question that constantly hovers over my thoughts, my actions and
behaviours leads back to the orientation of each said thought or behaviour. Where does the motivation to do this begin?

“My relationship with the Other as neighbour gives meaning to my relations with all the others” 33

My conscious waking state is one in which I am in a constant dialogue with my Other. It is only through my experience of my Other that I am aware of my Self as separate from this Other. Through the emphasis of solidifying my physicality and reinforcing it as an object of manipulation I am able to come into contact with my Self as my inner voice, away from the dominating and aggressive instructions that accompany my normal waking state. In the state of making I am able to disconnect from this repressive voice and connect with the fainter side of my Self.

My work is about the obsessive need for substantiation through the residue of the ritual. Performing the ritual induces in me the boundaries in which the physical movements are prescribed and can be ‘safely’ enacted. It is the experience of dissolving all rules beyond those that are prescribed. Adhering strictly to these restrictions the materiality of the medium is able to communicate in the process of the making. The coming-into-being, as Pollock acknowledges, of my true self is amplified through the process of making. It is exemplified with every mark, every cut, every individual crinkle that the paper withstands. It is all there, as forensic evidence of my bodily interaction with the material, recorded and transfixed and yet fleeting in the very vulnerability of the materiality itself. Paper dissolves, it tears, it burns, crumples and erodes. How can something so delicate hold the residue of my existence? How is it that I trust this form of solidity more than my own reflection?

"In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.” 34


The manner in which Sol Lewitt approaches the process of making parallels the predetermined boundaries present within my own making practice. Unlike Lewitt’s methodology, I find it a vital function to perform the making of the work myself, however the rules in which I may perform the making are produced prior to the execution of the art object.
This process of predetermination of action echoes that which occurs within ritualized behaviours. The beliefs that operate the prescription of behaviours substantiate the need for the boundaries that ritual as a conceptually founded method permits.

The work of Yayoi Kusama epitomises the process of the relationship between behaviours as prescribed and the work of art as residue of these behaviours. In Kusama’s work “The Obliteration Room” varying sizes of preprinted circular stickers are placed seemingly randomly throughout the room by viewers according to their own desires and yet strictly within Kusama’s instructions. This process is performed by visitors to the work until the pure white surfaces with which the room began transform into an amalgamation of circular colours, thick with the layers of colours underneath.
Within the prescribed realms of “The Obliteration Room” the artwork is performed in a state of absolute chaos. The actions of the viewers remain under their individual volition and the manner in which the stickered circles accumulate can only be performed as an extension of Kusama through her instructions.

Kusama also highlights the physicality of the remnants of ritualized behaviour in the manufacture of the *Infinity Net series*. The series, which Kusama has performed throughout her artistic career spanning over six decades, involves Kusama repeatedly painting small arches upon large canvasses which, when complete, appear as finely netted structures. The structure of the netted appearance originates from Kusama’s experience as a young girl of having the appearance of an object absorb the physicality of herself, in such a way that her Self was felt to disappear within the universe as she perceived it.
Like Kusama, it is not the process over the product of art that I am pursuing but rather the product as residue of the process. The object itself is as important, if not more so to me. It is the object alone that can verify that the process occurred at all. In my work, the aesthetic appreciation of the residual object or image is considered before the production of the work. Yet it only exists as a peripheral consideration.

The work of Wolfgang Laib actively engages with the investigation between ritualistic behaviours and the physical remnants of these behaviours whilst considering aesthetic limitations. Laib personally approaches this through the connection between spiritualism and ritualistic behaviours. Aesthetically the use of elements such as beeswax, rice, milk and pollen herald a sensorial reaction within the viewer. Laib’s milkstones directly correlate with the investigations between predetermined behaviours and ritualization.
The process of polishing the solid sheet of white marble so that it develops a slight indentation, a hollow in which milk is poured into, epitomises the relationship between action as gesture and object as remnant. The ritualistic sweeping of Laib’s physical Self over the marble during the construction of the milkstone in turn has the purpose of providing space for yet another ritual. The residue of the initial repetitive act remains as stage as the milkstone performs the act of containing the liquid which is poured into its well. This is furthered during the exhibition of these pieces as Laib insists upon performing the first pour of milk and then leaves the gallery staff with strict instructions as to how to clean and refill the milkstone on a daily basis.
When the milk and the stone are combined, due to their similarities in appearance, they are able to visually deceive the viewer with the appearance of solidity. The stone and milk appear to unite into a uniform object just as the appearance of an individual does not dramatically change with the induction of an Altered State of Consciousness. Yet the two, milk and stone, self and altered self, are inherently unique and cannot be reconciled on an atomic basis.

“Milk on stone, it is so still, so incredibly still. It seems like it can last forever……and it lasts only for a few hours. It has this high concentration, this density, because it lasts such a short time.” 35

Another of Laib’s work, branching from Hindu scripture, is the Brahmanda also known as the cosmic egg. The etymological trace of Brahmanda from Sanskrit to English literally translates to Biggest/Egg, just as the objectification of this concept is portrayed. The Brahmanda Purana text consists of a description of the history of the Universe according to the Sanskrit tradition. Within the text it is relayed that the universe began in the form of a golden egg. Laib speaks of the Brahmanda in its relationship to symbolism.

“It is a universal sculpture. It was important to make something which is not mine. The Brahmanda is not my shape. I did not invent it. It is something which I can participate in.” 36

35. LAIB, Wolfgang. 1986; in SZEEMANN, Harald
36. LAIB, Wolfgang; in JOSHI, Sonam. 2012
Through Laib’s actions as predetermined in the figurative representation of the totemic symbol, the stone transforms from organic form to highly polished ovoid structure. It is within the parameters established via the spiritually based text that Laib is able to portray his engagement with the materiality of the stone. The symbol of the Brahmanda has for Laib (just as with Kusama’s netting and dotting graphic mark making) been revisited throughout his artistic career. The revisitation of these works does not signify an alteration to an original representation as is the traditional sense of the term. Where ritualization is concerned, revisitation involves performance, a completely new engagement with new materials within the established milieu of the behaviour.
Above is an image of Kusama’s revisitation to the “Infinity net” process performed in the year 2000. Despite a forty year difference between the manufacture of this painting as compared to Figure 14 the manner in which Kusama has executed the image has barely changed. Hence the definition of ritualized behaviour. This is also evident in the image below of Laib performing an “initial pour” of a Milkstone during an exhibition and his revisitation to the Brahmanda object, again decades after the initial execution.
Figure 18
Wolfgang Laib preparing a *Milkstone*, 1999

Figure 19
**Wolfgang Laib**
*Brahmanda*, 2011
Black granite and oil, 21.2" x 21.2" x 37.4"
In the work that I had completed previous to the undertaking of this research my concerns were focussed upon obtaining the ‘truest’ image. I sought methods that attempted to remain authentic to the subject as an object.

I traced, scanned and photographed with precise detail(s)- Following the dictated line of the object religiously and attempting to relay this ‘truth’ in the final image.

Figure 20

Dianne McClaughlin

*Reality Tracing, Molly*, 2003

Permanent marker on acetate, 50 x 35 cm

I endeavoured to express my desire for accuracy in the experience of the object and yet portray the object figuratively. After the initial experimentation with the “Reality Tracings”, from the actual experience and from digital photography, I wanted to extend the expression of the object as a dimensional form. Through the layering of semittransparent coloured shapes I found that I could explore the object in the production of the work and also depict the intricacies of detail that were exposed in the
investigation of the object. I laboriously produced stencils and created colour charts according to the information that had been digitally derived from the object.

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 21**  
**Dianne McCloughlin**  
Papercut Stencil for *One Fish Swimming*, 2007  
One of Eighty stencils required for the work, dimensions variable

After which I would follow rules, like the rules according to a colour by number activity sheet. I knew what colour was to be applied when, and where, according to the instructions that I had obtained through the digital exploitation of the objects visual information.

![Image](image2.png)  ![Image](image3.png)

**Figure 22**  
**Dianne McCloughlin**  
*Ant*, 2005  
Screenprint on Hahnemühle paper, 78 x 105 cm

**Figure 23**  
Raw digital photograph of the ant
Whilst I found the production of these works satisfying on an aesthetic level, I knew that there was something more to be explored in the process and its philosophical foundation.

I align my work with the sociological content of anthropological ritualistic behaviours, as the research into these discourses highlights the correlation between the Altered State of Consciousness and the production of totemic images or symbolisation of the experience of this state. Though the expression of the state within these tribal cultures highlights the figurativeness of the ‘Other’ encountered, it serves as a representation as to the extreme separation between normal waking conscious self and that exposed in the process of ritualization. The ‘Other’ exposed through ritual is highlighted as one that exists only in that state. The effect being that the Other is understood as an “emotional or affectual experience that bears little relationship to the objective ‘truth’ of the content of the experience” 37

37. Ludwig, 1966; in BOURGIGNON, Erika. Altered States of Consciousness, Myths and Rituals, p.15
Uriah Kriegel summarises a similar sentiment in commentary upon the phenomenological experience as one that considers how the experience is an experience for me, the subject of the experience. The Self that is perceived within the Altered state directly correlates with the experience of the ritualistic trance. It is only in this state that I can know my Self in this way.

Indeed one of the most notable characteristics of experiencing an Altered State is that of a sense of ineffability. Not only does one find it difficult if not impossible to coherently vocalise this state to other people but also within oneself. The psychical distance that is created between Self as known and Self as ‘Other’ can only be bridged through the physical expression of the tangible form (body). In the movement of form the experience of Selves culminate to produce the effect of self-affirmation. The forensic embrace of gestural marking substantiates the presence of ‘I’. Again, I must be real because I made this, further extended to I was there when I made this.

The phenomenological experience, as one that is interpreted through individual sensations, exists within an internalised and highly secluded realm. The experience as private and extraordinary possesses quasi-religious connotations. The encounter between self and the Other as in the Altered State resonates within the individual as sacred and residually produces the sensation of divination. The spiritualistic aspect of the Altered Self directly parallels the incorporation of ritualism as not only the ability to induce the Altered State as portrayed within shamanistic cultures but also as the commemoration of the occasion in which the sensation of divinity originated.

In relation to my personal work it is through the ritual of breathing and then printing that breath that I see the effect of my inner self in tangible form. Tracing and cutting the lines that the breath creates enforces in me a sense of self-affirmation. The breath that has extended beyond me has stained the page in such a manner that I must follow. In its realization as a concrete element it has produced a set of instructions that allow for me to participate in a dialogue with it. The process of cutting the residue of my breath is a manner in which I can understand it as unique and yet constant. The objectification of my breath, prolonged and stagnated as image, acknowledges its existence and in turn that grants the knowledge of my Self as a being of physicality.
Conclusion
I cannot point to a part of my body and state that my “I” resides here. I cannot purge my innards into an image... and survive. I cannot deliberate a specific physiological part of me that I can analyse in some sort of scientific laboratory and manipulate in order to discover the me that has been hidden. Yet I crave for some sort of evidence of a true self, an undeniably existent self, my authentic self.

What I can do is to find a way to connect with what I consider to be my authentic Self. By establishing a structurally strict ritual that caters for unpredictable outcomes I can bypass the thoughts and demands of my normal waking consciousness and become connected to my “I” as it is experienced. As I cannot present a temporal state as static image the, residue of the ritual is what accounts for my existence. If I were to record my interaction with myself and present that solely as the work it would no longer be viable as a forensic trace. Instead it alters into a replaying of the ritual, like an anthropological documentary. It reduces the experience to a spectacle that denies the phenomenological experience of the self. By recording the experience as finite graphic marks it delineates those marks as sacred in relation to every other graphic mark that I may make. The mark is the manifestation of my desire to be present, to partake and exist beyond the Suspended State.

The urge to produce objects as residue of ritual directly stems from the experience of existing in a suspended state, a limbo between presence and absence.

The experience of the state of wakefulness, awake and yet not alert impacts upon the functioning capabilities of anyone that experiences it. Wakefulness, as termed by Levinas in relation to the effects of Insomnia upon the conscious Self, becomes a state of existence. It functions as a state of hovering in which the line between existence and disappearance blurs. It is a state of discomfort, confusion and fear that spurs the desire to seek relief.

“We surrender to sleep, but in the way that the master entrusts himself to the slave that serves him.”38

38. WORTHAM, Simon Morgan. L’ Arrêt de mort, Insomnia, Dreaming, Sleep: Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas
To experience Insomnia is to be denied of that which restores you. Insomnia steals the ability to fully awaken, refreshed and refuelled. It acts as a filter between the experience of the people and objects in the immediate environment due to the physiological effects that it burdens the body and mind with.

Insomnia holds the sufferer captive in the quest to secure slumber and the opportunity to escape the effects felt in the state of wakefulness.

Just as in Louis Bourgeois’s *Insomnia Drawings* it is not the quality of the marks that are made but rather that they are testimonial of her desire to sleep. They communicate through their abstraction the primordial desire and the base functioning requisite for sleep to secure a heightened chance of survival. They represent the desire to objectify that which is otherwise ineffable and ephemeral in its modality.

In the work of Bourgeois the experience of wakefulness as an altered state of consciousness serves as impetus for ritualization. In the hazy insomniatic state of exhaustion she retreats into a tool that has proven successful before. It emerges as a constant, known and familiar to Bourgeois it does not threaten but rather delivers the comfort, security and protection that she seeks to establish sleep.

The object that is a direct product of ritualized behaviours holds a common understanding in reference to the objectification of deities within tribal cultures. The personification of the object, particularly when understood within its cultural context, is able to impart a sense of rationalization as to the religious, mythical or cultural significations. The object acclaimed as possessing the powers of divinity becomes a tool for reconciling the psyche of the community with the unknown. This sentiment directly parallels that with which Bourgeois’ “Insomnia Drawings” are produced. The object serves to protect, encourage and adjudicate within the community and it is precisely the tactility of the deity as object that separates it from any other object. Those that are initiated into the community are easily able to identify with the object as representation. The object as a material entity develops into a surrogate for the ritual and the beliefs associated.
The object is the forensic trace of the myth. The object is produced in strict accordance with the belief system in which it operates.

The image as executed by those considered Action Painters serves as forensic evidence of the Self. The gesture of physicality frozen within the dimensional realm of the image signals the performance that was enacted before that images surface. The static encounter archived within the “four-sided arena” testifies as to the presence of a previous dynamic encounter. The language of which dictates that it must be understood through the movements undertaken in the dynamic state. The image as object exemplifies the very physicality of the manner in which it was made. It is impossible to observe the residual marks in the work of Jackson Pollock and not consider the process of the paint dripping from the brush whilst Pollock moved about the edges of the canvas, directing the drips as though he were narrating a stage-play. Just as when a direct bubble print is viewed it is impossible to not consider the process of breath that is required to produce the printed image. The printed bubble serves as the forensic evidence of breath.

The image as static encounter provides a tangible product that communicates in a language that relates directly to the ritual from which it derives. For Kusama the habitual use of polkadots creates the physical signifier for Kusama’s experience of dissolution into the universe. It is the manifestation of the experience as a tangible element. Kusama’s dedication to the polkadot as surrogate for experience reflects that of the tribal object as manifestation of divinity.

The revisitation by Kusama and Laib to the ritualized behaviours that they have performed throughout their careers emphasises the restorative effects that these rituals serve upon their sense of Self. As Bourgeois scribbles to obtain it, the belief system that Kusama and Laib have established around these rituals induces a sense of safety and security.

My breath, when transformed into a static encounter ritualistically provides the security in the assurance of my existence. The production of a discernible, discrete and definable line concretes my physicality as a being able to manipulate and stain. This line that exists purely because I do gets
traced. I follow it and transform it into an object as tangible in its reality as I desire to be. My body serves as container for which my Selves interplay, physicality as force is expression of existence. Tracing the line, is discovering my ‘I’.

“But, in its expression, in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business. It is as if that invisible death, ignored by the Other, whom already it concerns by the nakedness of its face, were already “regarding” me prior to confronting me, and becoming the death that stares me in the face. The other man’s [sic] death calls me into question, as if, by my possible future indifference, I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed; and as if, even before vowing myself to him [sic], I had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other into his [sic] mortal solitude. The other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face sums me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question…. as if I had to answer for the other’s death even before being.”39

39. LEVINAS, Emmanuel 1989, p.83
Appendix
Eating disorders are probably best known for their characteristic weight losing behaviours, such as self-starvation, and disordered eating patterns including binge eating. However, the experience of an eating disorder goes well beyond these.

For the sufferer there is a pervasive struggle with internal emotions and a sense almost of a 'second ego' - the illness. People speak of the 'anorexia' and very often of its voice. The voice may be male or female and is a voice in 'internal' space or from their own thoughts. It is often cruel, derogatory and commanding. It can directly and immediately interfere with therapy, e.g. telling the person not to eat the food placed in from them. This is not a 'psychotic' phenomena such as that experienced in illnesses such as schizophrenia as the experience is 'inside the mind' and not in external space. The person with an eating disorder thus has not lost connection with 'reality' although it may seem to come close to this. The fearful thoughts and preoccupations are held with an intensity that borders on the irrational or delusional but never quite crosses over into frank psychosis.

Recovery comes with the voice(s)' loss of impact and power, and freedom from anorexia and a confident and strong 'true' self.

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For Further Information on the experience of ‘Voices’ in Anorexia please see:
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See Me Here, 2013

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List of Images

Dianne McCloughlin
Blowing Breath, 2013
Clothes dye and bubble solution on high resolution paper, 21 x 29 cm

Dianne McCloughlin
Carved Breath, 2013
Papercut giclee print, 84 x 119 cm

Dianne McCloughlin
Reality Tracing, Molly, 2003
Permanent marker on acetate, 50 x 35 cm

Dianne McCloughlin
Papercut Stencil for One Fish Swimming, 2007
One of Eighty stencils required for the work, dimensions variable

Dianne McCloughlin
Ant, 2005
Screenprint on Hahnemühle paper, 78 x 105 cm

Dianne McCloughlin
Raw digital photograph of the ant

Dianne McCloughlin
Ant series (details), 2005
Screenprint on Hahnemühle paper, 78 x 105 cm