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As Above, So Below:
Traversing the Self through Images, Objects and Alchemy

by

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Photomedia

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Foreword

Reader, the purpose of this foreword is to provide context and reasoning for the paper's structure, as the fairest assumption to make is that you will be approaching this paper with little to no context as to its contents. This is a good thing. I would like as many varied perspectives as possible to enter and to leave with both answers and further questions.

This paper has been structured into twelve sections, each of which is in reference to one of twelve stages which make up three different more-or-less known linear processes:

The twelve operations of an alchemical process called the Great Work;
The twelve stages of a classical literary hero's journey; and
The twelve stages in the process of physical and psychological burnout.

Each section title is structured as follows:

‘[SECTION #]. ALCHEMICAL OPERATION // 'HERO'S JOURNEY' STAGE // PROCESS OF BURNOUT STAGE’

E.g ‘X. FERMENTATION // THE ROAD BACK // INNER EMPTINESS’

Of the three processes, the onus lies primarily on the twelve alchemical operations. The theoretical alchemical process forms the foundational guidelines of my studio and academic research. At the start of each section there is a short definition included which defines the alchemical operation in that section's title, since the alchemical words alone do not necessarily explain themselves (not intuitively). Each definition dictates the way in which I write about the thematic aspects of the research in that section.

The addition of the ‘hero’s journey stage’ and the ‘process of burnout’ stage in the section titles furthers the meaning of the alchemical word. It implies a narrative structure and demonstrates how there are multiple developments occurring and occupying the same narrative space—just as there is no singular theme or idea at work in each section, but instead a multitude which affect each other. My writing style has been best described to me as a helix; an ever spiralling thread of ideas, wherein each full turn is anchored by an axis running parallel to the helix (Fig. 1).

The twelve sequential stages in each overarching process imply a developmentally consistent linear passage of time. This is intended to reflect the process of the artist figure when undertaking studio research, which is one of the primary aspects of the Honours year. There is significance and intention in the use of numerically corresponding stages from each of the three processes in the section titles. When placed and read
next to one another (partitioned with ‘//’ to visually distinguish each phrase) the three phrases form a narrative. This hints at a progression in the sequence of events taking place, without providing detailed description of the section’s contents. Additionally, in some instances footnotes have been used as vehicles to further information alluded to in the main body of text beyond the traditional space and role of referencing. As I discuss in the first section, I. CALCINATION, language operates as the prevailing arbiter between external ideas and the individual’s perception of those ideas- I have intentionally avoided using keywords from the section's contents in its title, as the reader would automatically form assumptions about the contents based on the title. I would rather not give away too much information before the reader even reaches the section.

With that being said, go now from here; the Great Work awaits you.

Please engage and enjoy.
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Introduction

My Honours artwork and written paper address seeing and touching, knowledge and compulsive destruction of information, expression and repression. Each thematic aspect is dichotomous with at least one other, just like the opposing nature of light and its essential absence within the photographic darkroom (and all places). Each thematic aspect reflects the ways in which the microcosmic mirrors the macrocosmic within everything.

My Honours artwork is titled *Intrapersonal*. It consists of an embroidered grid on canvas for which the catalyst was the visual structure of patchwork quilts. The grid, like this paper, is sectioned into twelve main parts. Each section is numbered and reflective of each number's corresponding section title. Each contains photographic images which correlate to the titles' meaning, just barely existing on the canvas' surface. Likewise, each section of this paper is prefaced by one image from the corresponding section on the canvas of the artwork, overlaid with an illustration from that same section of the artwork. But nowhere in this paper is there an image of the artwork as a whole. *Intrapersonal* is closely tied to my personal life and experiences; it is emblematic of an ongoing linear process to feel better, to get better and to be better. Both the artwork and the paper centre around the number twelve for its foundational position in those three overarching processes described in the foreword: alchemy, the hero’s journey, and burnout. The number twelve is highly valued for its symbolic capacity; it is even, signifies a complete set (think of a ‘baker’s dozen’), and is fundamental in how we measure the passage of time: hours, months, and the number of childhood years before the onset of adolescence;

The twelve operations are sometimes compared with the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The Zodiac is used as a symbol for progression of the Great Work. There is also a connection to the Twelve Labours of Hercules. Hercules is sometimes portrayed in alchemical iconography. The hermetic Philosophers were well versed in Greek mythology, and thus one needs to read up on the stories of these Twelve labours because they are all symbolic for inner, spiritual work that a candidate for the spiritual path needs to undergo.¹

The purpose of *Intrapersonal* is to navigate and better understand the self, and the purpose of the paper is to explain and further the grounds for this navigation. Here, in this place, at this time, I critically examine my role as an artist, and the role of the artist in the context of research. I accomplish this by projecting myself onto the fictional figure of the alchemist. The basis of the alchemist's practice, like that of the artist's, is always the work being carried out. The research must be part of the work, just as the work must be part of the research.

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The artist/alchemist is always working towards the opus.\textsuperscript{2}
The artist’s/alchemist’s goal is to continuously learn, improve and thus grow. The artist/alchemist strives to wrest that which they seek from the depths of the material.

\textit{FIG. #2}

The stages of the Great Work, as represented illustratively using symbols representing the earth (base), spirit (giant’s breath), chaos (black stream), and many, many more.

Source: flatbed scan taken from C. G. Jung’s \textit{Psychology and Alchemy}, 284.

“Within the stone slumbers an image for me, the image of my visions!
Ah, that it should slumber in the hardest, ugliest stone!”

- Friedrich Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra
I. **CALCINATION // ORDINARY WORLD // COMPULSION TO PROVE ONESELF**

Calcination: the reduction of bodies to their base principles without destruction of their seed virtues.\(^3\)

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1. First, the feeling of nothing; then of everything all at once. An awareness of self and an understanding of place, conflicted with a desire to become unrecognisable- have you ever wanted to just reduce and dissolve?\(^4\) As surely as what once was solid will ultimately melt into air, so too will reflected light become a series of granulated patterns on emulsion in order to form an image.\(^5\) Once developed and cast from the comfortable womb of the

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\(^3\) Each of the short bolded definitions, starting with this one and included in each section have been paraphrased. The original definitions are written by Dirk Gillabel, who posts written articles about subjects relating to the occult on his website House of the Sun. His definitions have provided a base knowledge from which I have been able to better understand the twelve stages of the alchemical Great Work. “Dirk Gillabel,” House of the Sun, last modified unknown, http://www.soul-guidance.com/houseofthesun/alcha12operations.htm.

\(^4\) Each of the twelve sections opens with a ‘narrative’ sentence or two which aims to simultaneously set the tone for the section and embody the meaning of each of three stage titles which make up the section’s title. These sentences are marked by the presence of the roman numeral corresponding to the number of that section.

In this first one, I am referring to the sensation of starting to read a paper; at this point, having read none of its content (anxious feeling of ‘nothing’) but knowing how much is yet to come (overwhelming feeling of ‘everything’). Awareness of self and place: acknowledging your position of reader (and mine of writer) just as the individual in the hero’s journey acknowledges their boundaries and comfort zone. Finally, wishing to become unrecognisable: both an illustration of the compulsion to prove one’s own worth (the first stage of psychological burnout) and of an unnameable sensation that I associate with starting any large project, i.e. procrastinating to avoid the disappointment of producing writing not up to one’s own personal standards. Irrationally wishing to disappear rather than risk failure.

\(^5\) The analogy of the solid “melting” into air refers to the inevitable reduction of all valuable (solid) objects into matter without value (air), since capital’s exchange value has no real value or meaning behind it beyond what people ascribe to it. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 16.
developing tank it ‘becomes’ something (it is *transmuted*; imbued with meaning). It cannot be allowed to exist without signification - this is unthinkable. Consider how highly coded all representations are; how, like the state, the camera is never neutral. To dismiss our complex history of semiotics, so deeply ingrained within the consciousness of communication, would be anarchic. Within an image, matter is reduced to its conceptual core: what is *seen*, what is *interpreted*, and what is *understood*. The process of perception is a transformative course of ideological development which describes an active process in which the viewer is engaged in their own sensorial perception, as opposed to just passively looking. Every transformative process is mediated by language. In the limbo between what is *seen* by the eye and what is *comprehended* by the brain, language bridges the gap between *seeing* and *comprehension*. You see a [blank]. You know that it is a [blank] because it looks like what you understand to be a [blank]. You call the [blank] a [blank] because according to known language and logic that is what it is called (Fig. 3).

Conversely, when the [blank] is captured in a photograph and chemically coaxed from the recesses of the film’s emulsion, forced under the scrutinous gaze of light - the very material from which it was conceived - the [blank] continues to be seen, comprehended and described as its literal self. Roland Barthes discusses in *Camera Lucida* the phenomena of using the photograph of an object or person as a stand in for that object or person:

> ...a photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope. Show your photographs to someone - he will immediately show you his; "Look, this is my brother; this is me as a child," etc.; the Photograph is never anything

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7 This entire first paragraph is a revised version of a piece of prose text written by me at the start of the first semester of the Honours year. It was written directly after reading and is in response to the writing of David Haines, senior lecturer at SCA. Haines’ provided Honours students with a reworked but unpublished extract from his 2012 PhD paper titled *Networked Ambergris: A Carnival of Synthesis*. The full paper is titled *Osmologies: Towards Aroma Composition*. 

2
but an antiphon of "Look," "See," "Here it is"; it points a finger at certain vis-a-vis, and cannot escape this pure deictic language.8

You describe a photograph of your brother as, “this is my brother”- instead of “this is a photograph of my brother”. Both subject (brother) and object (photograph) are contrived as synonymous in terms of sentimental currency. Historically, the photograph as a palpable object has been used as a substitute for the absent subject.9 The modern day equivalent of this might be the carrying of a small portrait of a loved one inside your wallet. The corporeal presence of the photograph as an object is more pervasive in the current era of digital imagery than it has ever been. Upon seeing the image in the wallet there are instant associations made.10 This is the mediation which language—whether phonetic or visual—performs instantaneously. Our interpretation of visual imagery is so critical to language; “Who hasn’t torn up pictures of an ex-lover and noticed the way the eyes in the torn bits still accuse, their power heightened by the aimlessness of them? How can this vivid presence be such an awful absence?” (emphasis added)11

What significance does an image harbour in the context of a post literate and mechanically revolutionised world, where everything tangible is a consumable object? “Within this semiotic universe,” Susan Stewart, author of On Longing suggests, “the material object is transformed completely to the realm of exchange value.”12 You cannot make ‘transformation’ and ‘language’ into artworks themselves— they are (rightfully) intangible. You make your artwork and you use transformation and language as your subconscious tools. Your artwork is seen by others and they use transformation and language to interpret the artwork’s meaning— and its value. “Value,” says philosopher of political aesthetics Esther Leslie, “moves from one thing to another, in the process of an object’s modification.

This is a physical process and is traceable...However, in the course of capitalist production something chemically untraceable is also generated: exchange value. This is capital’s most magical transformation— the invention of exchange value. A much-quoted line from The Communist Manifesto describes the impact of capitalism as vaporisation in which ‘all that is solid melts into air.’”13


9 Since Victorian times there has existed the notion of the photographic portrait embodying or ‘containing’ a person’s soul. Geoffrey Batchen, Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), 12.

10 The person photographed must be significant for the individual to have gone to the trouble of printing and cutting out the image rather than just saving it to their smartphone. Is the subject family? A lover? Are they alive or deceased; is the nature of the photograph’s purpose nostalgic or memorial? This is one of the ways that the photographic image impacts daily life.


II. COAGULATION // CALL TO ADVENTURE // WORKING HARDER

Coagulation: the inseparable union of the fixed and the volatile into one mass that is so fixed that it can withstand the most violent fire.

II. Let us herald now, with aching limbs, the summons of the melting pot.

I refer to work produced in my studio research this year as ‘phototextiles’, a word which reflects the amalgamation of the two practices which form it. A disclaimer: I do not, by any means, believe that I am the first to make work which combines aspects of photography and textile-making. To my knowledge the term ‘phototextiles’ has not been used in any academic or artistic texts (at least from what I have been able to find). The practice of combining two artistic mediums has come about naturally from years of multidisciplinary interests. I hope to take the history and significance of both mediums and forge a new path of potential work, theory and cognitive associations; something which may brave the coagulative fires of the alchemist’s alembic pot.

Context is vital in discussing the nature of any art practice, which is why I must acknowledge that both photography and textiles possess histories deeply entrenched in colonialism. This is particularly true of textiles, whose (far older) colonial history is one of violence and institutionalised subjugation of practices and knowledge (see V.

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14 “Melting pot” traditionally refers to a pot in which metals or other materials are melted and mixed. Here, I intend its use as being analogous of combing artistic mediums within studio research- both studio and mind become the pot; both material practices and their conceptual counterparts are the pot’s contents.

15 The alembic pot is a piece of equipment which was used by alchemists for distilling chemicals. It consists of three parts- first, the “cucurbit” (still pot) which holds the liquid to be distilled, heated by a flame directly below it. Next, the “cap”, which fits over the mouth of the cucurbit to receive vapours which condense and run down a connected downward-sloping tube. Last, the “receiver”, which catches the distilled liquid contents from the sloped tube. The purpose of distillation is to purify a substance into its purest form. I make use of the conceptual alembic pot here as an analogy for the compounding of two traditionally separate artistic practices. “Information Age,” Wikipedia, accessed July 30, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alembic.
Civilisation is based deeply in imagery through which we navigate and understand the world. Photography’s role in colonialism has been more to do with exoticised depiction and ‘othering’. With the advent of the portable camera and darkroom, hunters could change their tactics; rather than hunt big game in Africa, a photograph of the beast could instead be brought home and hung in the living room like a trophy of conquest. Here, it would say; here is my proof: I came, I saw, I conquered. The onus here is always on the triumphs of the individual- the careful cultivation of an avatar through images (see IX. INCINERATION). Susan Sontag articulates this phenomenon as an evolutionary exchange of hand-tool: “Guns have metamorphosed into cameras…When we are [were] afraid, we shoot. But when we are [now] nostalgic, we take pictures.”

Although textile-making has not ever been a universally female pastime, it is predominantly associated with women (see VI. DISTILLATION). Within pre-Industrial cultures women were typically the spinners of cloth, which is considered a generative action and is associated with creating life- i.e., with the womb and with birth. However it has only been since the Renaissance that sewing has been widely defined as an expression of femininity. It has come to be associated with the domestic, the personal, and the interior (private) plane of consciousness, whereas photography has always been perceived as the apex of objectivity and depiction of the ‘real’. This reads like a sliding-scale of subjective/female vs. objective/male, directly reflective of the binarised nature which Western philosophical thinking is based around. The Western canon is the position from which I operate, but that does not make it the definitive truth- history is written only as those in power dictate it to be written. Abuse of power comes as no surprise.

For me, the significance of COAGULATING photography and textiles lies in the functionality of both the photographic and textile object as articles of prosthetic memory. I am interested in objects as sites of memorial; in the creation of something (that can be seen and touched) from absolutely nothing; in the psychological foundations of both mediums in terms of catharsis and truth.

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16 The rise of capitalistic trade spearheaded by British and New England colonisers during the 1700-1900s saw the devaluing of the “other” into commodity, to be either traded alongside cloth goods (e.g. during the Atlantic triangular slave trade) or subjugated into unpaid labour involving cloth-making (e.g. India’s colonisation and struggle for independence). Beverly Gordon, Textiles: The Whole Story (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 167-172.


19 Gordon, Textiles: The Whole Story, 18, 38, 40, 137.


21 Belinda Wright, “Art Form - Artefact: A theoretical evaluation of the textile medium, its history and current use in Australian art and culture” (M.F.A., University of Tasmania, 2003), iii-iv.

22 This phrase is one of nearly 300 infamous aphorisms coined by American conceptual artist Jenny Holtzer. She began devising these in the late 1970s.
III. FIXATION // REFUSAL OF THE CALL // NEGLECTING NEEDS

Fixation: an ongoing process that starts from the moment of Blackness throughout Whiteness, and with Redness fixation has attained its maximum degree. Fixation is very similar to coagulation, but it is usually taken in the sense of continuous dissolving and fixation from the very beginning to the end.

III. FIXATED upon articulating something locked behind the iron mask of memory- so detrimental to lived experience. Perhaps it is safer, easier, to simply remain within the known realm.  

What we know of the world is based on images- as critic/theorist John Berger states, “seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak.” Visual interpretations, recreated visions of the world; images are always man-made and reinterpreted upon sight via pathways of language. Memory operates as a reference point from which our view of reality is derived. Barthes theorised that “not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory…but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter memory...The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused...”

Of the twelve alchemical operations, FIXATION is among the easier phrases to interpret without the aid of a written definition. The automatic association of the word is with the feeling and action of being fixated, obsessed, transfixed. Conversely to the artist/chemist figure’s FIXATION on the end goal of their work, the individual undergoing the hero’s journey stage of Refusal of the Call faces now deeply internalised personal doubts and may become the opposite of fixated (flighty, forgetful, flustered). They may even begin neglecting needs in their efforts to avoid the inevitability of their journey and the work it will entail. Of course, the realm of the known (consciousness) feels far safer and easier to occupy that the unknown (subconsciousness).


Barthes, Camera Lucida, 91.
What this means is that although imagery triggers memory, photographs, with their indiscriminate attention to detail, capture “too much” information to function sufficiently as memory.\textsuperscript{26} Even memories associated with non-visual senses are always stored with pictorial association within the brain. Every memory recalled is not the event alone but the memory of a memory—how it is reinterpreted after the passing of time has dulled its edges and detail begins to fade.\textsuperscript{27} Objects and images which epitomise memories therefore came to be treasured as accurate records for their objectivity.

Photo technology advances continuously in order to satiate our hunger for entrapping various specific points in time within an image. Through our image-capturing technology the world may be objectively realised, thus functioning as a method of overcoming the anthropological detriment of short memories due to short lifespans.\textsuperscript{28} “…and so we take our photographs voraciously and anxiously, as if to fail to do so would be to let our precious memories fade into the mists of time”.\textsuperscript{29} Image-capturing technology may be viewed as a linear scale, read from left-to-right, like text (Fig. 4): on the far left resides painting/drawing, which both attempt to take after and represent the ‘real’ world. Photography occupies the scale’s centre, being a medium whose creation re-signified the descriptive function of hand-rendered imagery, embodying ‘truth’ by objectively consummating reality.\textsuperscript{30} On the far right dwells virtual reality, which signifies an attempt to duplicate reality to the point of it becoming indistinguishable from ‘true’ reality. But at what point does the sign replace that which is being signified (a simulacra)?

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig4.png}
\caption{Drawn representative ‘sliding scale’ of types of representational technologies.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{26} Batchen, \textit{Forget Me Not}, 16.


\textsuperscript{29} Batchen, \textit{Forget Me Not}, 8.

\textsuperscript{30} Truth is a concept of Realism. Truth is always relative to the perception of the individual. Photography was hailed as a ‘medium of truth’ for its lack of discrimination between the (perceived) significant and the (perceived) insignificant within an image—the camera renders every visual detail laid before it, answering to neither gods nor masters…not even to the photographer.
Jean Baudrillard describes the conceptual replacement of reality by imitations as a phenomena which he coined “hyperreality”.

Our inability to recall events directly forces us to instead recall not the event alone, but also the memory of a memory. The significator (photograph) comes to replace the referent (subject) in the consciousness of the individual, functioning as a mnemonic device. Photographic memory is prosthetic memory: the result of a dramatisation of events either not lived or only partially lived by the individual.

What fascinates us about ever-advancing image-capturing technology is what we don’t understand about it. This has signalled a nostalgic return for many people- including myself- to the analogue camera and to darkroom film processing. Perhaps what is so enchanting about these objects and their time-consuming processes is that their physicality brings us closer to experiencing the ‘real’. Tangible, touchable, the photographic object bridges the gap between our conscious selves and the experience of time anchored by the image, in a way that the incorporeal (digital) image cannot. In a medium once so highly prized for its ‘claim’ on reality, analogue photography now appears nostalgic for its ‘realness’.

Nostalgia- what an illogical feeling, a pleasurable sadness; once medically considered a form of neurosis caused by the swelling of brain tissue. No wonder, given how a yearning for the past ultimately serves no purpose- a fixation which leads only to ruin.


32 Morris, Images: Illusion and Reality, 6.

33 Definition: mnemotechnics (techniques of memory) exist in the individual as strategies by which to systematically remember information.


36 While the digital photograph still possesses merit as an image and a catalyst for recollection, it is much easier to think of the digital as being “not real”; we know logically that no matter what we see it can be broken down to individual pixels and translated into something else through the alchemy of the computer. With a handheld photographic object, more than one sense is engaged- primarily touch in addition to sight, and possibly hearing and smell. Of course the photographic object too can be broken down to its physical components: paper, ink, chemicals; nought but atoms in the grand scheme of things. When the photograph can be torn, can be waterlogged, can be damaged, it is perceived as being more precious. Usually our digital photos are considered backups rather than primary targets of care.


38 Batchen, Forget Me Not, 14.
Dissolution: the reduction of a body to its primal matter, or elemental principles.

IV. Disillusioned, panicked, and drawn inward toward the subconscious self. For this section I would like to shift the primary focus from the visual to the tactile.

To reduce textile practices to their base materials: a foolish measure? Perhaps not, since our conscious visualisation of reality centres metaphorically around textiles: we hang by a thread, we weave stories, we live according to our moral fibre. That we have based so many sayings around textile metaphors reads as an indicator to the significance of these practices in building our understanding of the world. Textiles have for thousands of years

39 The word “DISSOLUTION” sounds very similar to “disillusion(ed)”, which is how the individual undertaking the Hero’s Journey Stages likely feels before being given the courage to overcome their internal dilemmas. Alchemical DISSOLUTION refers to a reduction of material into its core, which parallels how the individual may react to stage four of psychological burnout, displacement of conflicts: panic and perceived threat can lead to drawing inward to the self and away from others, centring consciousness around the self.

been significant in every human ritual between birth and death.\textsuperscript{41} Cloth, like the organic body, frays, decays and disintegrates over time. Its capacity to grow, shrink, and absorb makes it unique among materials.\textsuperscript{42} As a physical object cloth has been integral to human survival as shelter, containment of food and belongings, comfort, social and economic interaction, as well as expression of ideas, beauty and creativity.\textsuperscript{43}

However, the Industrial Revolution and consequent rise of consumerism caused a profound shift in the value of cloth. Consider how inexpensive and expendable textile objects such as clothing and linens have become in first world countries. The introduction of mechanised processes by industrialism turned processes of cloth-making ‘invisible’, thus causing Westernised attitudes to correlate textile handcrafts with the domestic and feminine.\textsuperscript{44} Within the art world it wasn’t until the rise of textile-based protest art during the 1970s that textiles were even loosely considered a ‘valid’ form of visual art.\textsuperscript{45} Before this, Modernist art and thought paradigms of the mid-20th Century positioned craft and the handmade as the ‘other’ of art. Handcraft practices were considered to be “too indebted to the past” and “not spontaneous enough” to produce ‘original’ art objects.\textsuperscript{46} Despite this, artistic fabric drapery in the West possesses an incredibly rich history, surviving within painting as interpretations of surviving classical sculpture.\textsuperscript{47} Both the utilitarian and aesthetic value of cloth is realised in these ‘handcraft’ed artworks, showcasing an ongoing fascination.

My intention in using textile material is based in a desire to coax images into the tactile realm by placing them onto cloth, thus imbuing them with tangible qualities. The COAGULATION of the visual and the tactile has been referred to as ‘haptic vision’ in artist John Tonkin’s M.F.A. paper excerpt \textit{Experiments in Proximity: chapter 2. audit (my own worst enemy)}:

\begin{quote}
I was interested in the camera visually ‘touching’ the body, so we tried to operate the camera at as close a distance as we could. This meant that the resulting imagery was often shaky, blurred, and indistinct. Laura Marks describes such film and video images as haptic, and suggests that they turn the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} Eg, newborns are wrapped in cloth almost immediately after emerging from the womb; the deceased are wrapped in cloth for honour, protection, and spiritual reasons. Many coming of age and milestone rituals centre around garments and fabric (traditionally coloured wedding and baptismal garments, the K’aaba in Mecca is draped in \textit{Kiswa} cloth each year, linens used in dowry bundles, to name just a few examples). Gordon, \textit{Textiles: The Whole Story}, 44-46.


\textsuperscript{44} Gordon, \textit{Textiles: The Whole Story},


eye into an organ of touch operating at an intimate proximity. (Fig. 5)

The notion of haptic vision resonates with my own work because it mediates the experience of viewing *Intrapersonal* to the basic elements of seeing and feeling, which, on a biochemical level, come before perceiving and understanding. Like any other physical object, a textile artwork's value is anthropocentric. Textile objects are typically associated with the social sphere of domesticity, in which all objects “whether intentional or not; desirable or not, conscious or not…convey messages about the inhabitants.” I am creating a textile object which *visually* resembles a quilt (domestic) but *functionally* operates as a piece intended as an artwork (public), and placing this within the context of a gallery which alters its value—when social rules forbid the touching of an object conventionally meant to be touched, viewers must substitute with their own imagined sensations. It is my intention with *Intrapersonal* to utilise the Grad Show as an opportunity to display a work which compromises the automatic route of thought of the viewer by inviting touch but not allowing it; by presenting a narrative or turmoil without providing resolution.

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Digestion: transformation from one substance to an other in order to obtain something more useful.

V. Once in the belly of the beast there is no turning back. Changes have already begun, and the end product is now all that matters.\(^5^0\) This section is about occultism, which may seem like an unusual subject for an Honours paper, but as stated in the foreword it forms the linear structure of my writing and studio research. My experiences in this process are situated somewhere between narrative, persona, reflection and elements of alchemy. By dedicating a section of the paper to the subject I hope to further illuminate my reasoning for structuring my work around this unconventional topic. The word “occult” refers to the illumination of hidden knowledge, defined literally as “not understood or able to be understood by the mind, beyond the range of ordinary knowledge…those would-be sciences of the ancient and medieval worlds, such as magic, alchemy, astrology and theosophy, which were supposed to contain some knowledge of…the secret and mysterious forces of nature.”\(^5^1\) It took until the nineteenth century for occultism to develop into a way of looking at the world in Europe, but facts, beliefs, theories and techniques of this worldview are known to have been embraced in later antiquity (around 300-500 CE). Some older practices (magic, astrology, theurgy, necromancy) had been in use some two thousand years before even that, only fading into esoteric (hidden) obscurity in wake of the separation of magic from religion by Christianity.\(^5^2\) The purpose of incorporating elements of the occult into one’s worldview is therefore not an outright rejection of normalised ways of thinking, but simply as the exploration of alternative pathways of knowledge for the

\(^{50}\) By this I am referring to the DIGESTIVE transformation which occurs when writing from the perspective of the artist/chemist; my experiences and ideas are forming on the page and becoming more ‘real’. I am at the Hero’s Journey stage of crossing the threshold in which the individual continues their journey past the point of being able to return to how their life once was. Similarly, at this point of writing this paper (August) I am too far into the Honours course to be able to turn back without feeling like I’ve wasted my time on a project I didn’t see through to the end. Finally, a revision of values: I am questioning whether the end goal of a finished artwork and finished paper are more important that the process of the Honours course, and if I am really suited to the structure of the course.


\(^{52}\) Nataf, *The Occult*, 1.
The purpose of expanding one's worldview and critical examining one's own morals, values and intentions (or at least, this is how I personally think of it).

Alchemy is one such alternative school of thought. Throughout this paper I frequently refer to a process named the Great Work, a process which is representative of altering material in such a way that it becomes better than it once was via transmutation. Within the Great Work, alchemy is known as a nexus which connects science and magic:

The origins of alchemy are lost in the mists of time. Were the first alchemists smiths or perfumers? Is alchemy a forerunner of modern chemistry? …alchemy, like speech, is perhaps as old as the human race… it is, in effect, a metaphor for the human state.\(^{53}\)

The very nature of alchemy is one shrouded in metaphor. This is perhaps what makes it so effective as an analogy for my own working and thought processes this year. I will reiterate from the foreword that the onus is placed upon transformation within the alchemical realm, embodying the process of change and the momentum which drives the narrative. I spoke in I. CALCINATION, of language as a transformative agent which mediates the gap between seeing and understanding. Alchemy is said to operate in a similar manner: unlike “vulgar” chemistry, whose purpose is to dissect nature’s compounds, alchemy is the “chemistry of the hermetists [which] is the art of working with nature to perfect them.”\(^{54}\) But what drives the alchemist to carry out such work? The same could be asked of the artist; why dedicate yourself to the creation and perfection of ideas and objects? C.G. Jung tells us that the answer lies within the collective unconscious:

…turn your mind upon the salt and think not of other things; for in it alone [i.e., the mind] is the science concealed and the most excellent and most hidden secret of all the ancient philosophers…The essential secret of the art lies hidden in the human mind- or, to put it in modern terms, in the unconscious… the operator should rise to the height of his task: he must accomplish in his own self the same process that he contributes to the matter, for “things are perfected by their like”.\(^{55}\)

I feel that this passage accurately pinpoints the key similarities between the figures of artist and alchemist. Transformation, process and end goal are so important to both figures. Occultism has been the best suited lens for me to examine these ideas because its very nature questions different positions of reality, and provides ample room for potential of that which is as of yet undefined by modern science, psychology and rationality. Because of this, there is room for multiple voices and perspectives. This is important as it allows for the critical examination and deconstructualization of significant bodies of thought (see VI. DISTILLATION).


\(^{54}\) Nataf, *The Occult*, 6.

VI. DISTILLATION // TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES // DENIAL OF EMERGING PROBLEMS

Distillation: when the volatile ascends it has in itself the fixed that will fix the volatile afterwards. It is a continuous circulation. ‘Fixing’ is like holding the awareness.

VI. Purified by the knowledge of what is to come, and yet at once terrified by it. A thematic overlap exists between textile history and occultism: the subjugation of women’s knowledge. Textile and handcraft history is not wholly and exclusively associated with women; these practices are far older than the cultural and social analysis within Western

56 The process of DISTILLATION is essentially the purification of a liquid by first heating it to turn it to vapour, and then catching the vapour on the glass of the instrument and letting it condense into droplets which form the end result: a concentrated and more valuable version of the original. Likewise, the artist/ALCHEMY works to DISTILL their own knowledge and skills through study and practical application, always looking towards the reward of the end product, the Great Work. However, growing expectations imposed upon the self and fear of failure have the capacity to become paralysing. The slightest of setbacks can become major grievances, and the Artist/Alchemist must choose to either forge ahead, denying any emerging problems lest they lose momentum, or else fall back and taste the bitterness of dreaded failure.

57 This is very important to acknowledge, as I do not wish to spread misinformation or appear uninformed. An analysis of textiles based entirely within the realm of the feminine overlooks the potential of exploration in a broader social sense. This would only serve to further ‘occult’ the knowledge I am aiming to demystify.
philosophies which are constructed around binary dichotomies of male/female. The occult is similar in its long history and social inclusion of practices by all genders. Occultism in particular provides *terra nullius* for the hidden powers surrounding institutional knowledge; shrouded in obscurantism and incorporeality. Textiles seems to contrast this with its materiality and grounding realism, and its vital connection to everyday life and survival.

I will cite Tracey Emin’s *Hellter Fucking Skelter* (Fig. 6) as an example of contemporary textile art which works to reveal truths. Every visual aspect of this work, save for the text, directly references domesticity, comfort, warmth; the feminine handmade. The text is intensely personal and strikingly autobiographical. It speaks of experiences of misogyny, and strangely of childlike antagonism. The work’s asymmetry, chaos of conflicting colours, and visible stitching all indicate an object made by hand, and thus assumes the speed of the human body. The act of sewing itself has long been regarded as a form of psychic survival; mark-making may be an act of catharsis and something which connects us to history through the repetition of actions of people who lived before us.

![Fig. #6](tracey-emin-hellter-fucking-skelter.webp)

**FIG. #6**
Tracey Emin’s *Hellter Fucking Skelter*
2001
Appliqué blanket
253x220cm

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58 Belinda Wright, “Art Form - Artefact”, iii-iv.

In comparison to the clothweaver, we have the spellweaver. Though most often correlated with the realm of the fantastical over the ‘real’, the spellweaver’s work is similar in its intent and potential to illuminate knowledge which has been hidden by institutions of power; for example:

6. We do not recognise authoritarian hierarchy, but do honour those who teach…
9. We believe in the affirmation and fulfilment of life in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness giving meaning to the Universe we know and out personal role in it...
10. Our only animosity towards Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy of life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be the only way and have sought to deny freedom and suppress other ways of religious practice and belief.
- Three of thirteen Principles of Wiccan Belief adopted in 1974 by the Council of American Witches.60

Francesca de Rimini, an artist and researcher who is part of the Australian cyberfeminist art group VNS Matrix, self-published a zine titled HEXz #2 (short for Hexecutable (hex 2)) (Figs. 7 and 8) which is formatted around the number nine and is about the alteration of knowledge and personal philosophy through the process of ritual. Witchcraft and spell casting are used as analogies for the historical and continuous subjugation of women’s knowledge.61 Heavily visual, HEXz #2 centres around symbols and imagery sourced from historical books and classical artworks which contrast with the artist’s often inflammatory written ideology regarding feminism and anti-capitalism. HEXz #2 parallels Hellter Fucking Skelter on a number of levels, the first of which being physical. Both are handmade objects imbued with intent and meaning by the hand of the artist. Art making is a generative process which both the clothweaver and spellweaver undertake in their work. Both figures are practitioners of different crafts but share many similarities in their philosophies. Such a personal process, so often related to self expression, is wont to be used by those who sympathise with histories of subjugation and oppression; for many women, textile and occult practices have long been used as a voice to break silencing.62 63 Textile practices and occultist practices have increasingly gained traction and popularity since around the 1960s, used as methods of reclaiming autonomy and chronicling unspoken histories.64

61 The format of De Rimini’s zine is part of what inspired my process of formatting a paper and artwork around a particular number, as well as using aspects occultism as an analogy for my practice.
63 Heather Marsh, “Witches and how they are silenced,” Heather Marsh, Rethinking the moats and mountains (blog), May 1, 2014, https://georgiebc.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/witches-and-how-they-are-silenced/.
FIG. #7
Inside front cover of Francesca de Rimini’s zine, titled HEX₂ #2.
Self-published by the artist in April of 2015.
Source: flatbed scan of physical copy.

Hexecutable
(hex 2)
A remedy for collective exhaustion caused by the internalization of neo-capitalism and its plague of austerity measures.

INGREDIENTS
2 LambdaMOO spaces with titles over a duration of 9 weeks from
160 words formatted and read from a Mac
source: The Command Line Interfacial (2014)
Bogus, Sine Nescio, Carla Goldberg, La Parra
O’Hara, Lisa, Mark Lumbard, Edward Schuck, Hbd Huyett, Michel-Ing

FIG. #8
Inside back cover of Francesca de Rimini’s zine, titled HEX₂ #2.
Self-published by the artist in April of 2015.
Source: flatbed scan of physical copy.

Come, Hexen!
In 2014 I produced the first HEXzine as a companion to the Hexecutable domain I created within the online LambdaMOO server/community. My test The Return of the Command Line Interfacial on LambdaMOO observed that “software is inherently social...the product of mental and communicative labor [that] serves social purposes... Software also propels disorders in the social and material domains... nothing is immune from emergent and immanent states of collapse... these disorders are generative, giving rise to new social formations, and, perhaps, the collapse of inter-capitalism from within.”
Spells are also software, instructions to be determined to produce a change. A change in transformational fields (the love potion), a change in fortune (good or bad), a change in the weather, and so forth. These spells require, to some extent at least, a shared belief in the power of spells, and more importantly, a belief that humans can effect change through collective practices that combine the symbolic and the actual, the embedded and the teleological.

We do not have to gaze very far towards or outbound to know how deeply locked so many things are. Altered, all alined. Everywhere you look there is suffering and devastation. Yet it’s not too late for some serious witching, to begin the process of unfrying. Spells by the hexen (bitching HEX₂ #2 are cast with this desire, their acts of radical generosity responding to Fury’s call to “rise up singing.”
May the coven grow.

FIG. #9
Spell Casters
Thank you beloved Hexen for casting your spells.
See you beyond the limen. Amor y Rabia! Forever Doll xx
p 6 heart of the beloved
Linda Demere
https://lindademere.com
p 7 a herbalist’s barmet of cancer daemons
Maja Zuzmanovic
https://maja.com/19493358
p 9 sahll beach villas, longpigi
Adrian Coox
p 11 fish familiar
Bronwyn Kamp
p 13 this is not a Trap (response #2)
Jennifer Lyons-Telk
changemedia.net.au
p H-15 throw the first
Tina Nolan
too-also.com
p 16 nine reflections
Carl Haddad
changemedia.net.au
p 25 begin...again
Joel Valentine
p 24doesharmz
michaelgomm

SPELL CASTERS
VII. SUBLIMATION // APPROACH // WITHDRAWAL

Sublimation: Purification of the matter by means of dissolution and reduction to its principles....making more subtle all terrestrial and heterogeneous parts, and giving them a perfection from which they were deprived.

VII. A longing for perfection demands an inward examination. Amelioration of body comes only after that of the mind, so cast your gaze toward the innermost sanctuary and steel yourself for confrontation.\(^{65}\) If you recall the chronological ‘sliding scale’ (see III. FIXATION) of representational technology from the same section, I placed drawing and painting on its far left, photography in its centre, and virtual reality on its far right. Within the locus of photography there is yet another perceived dichotomous scale: that of analogue/digital (Fig. 9).\(^ {66}\)

\(^ {65}\) SUBLIMATION in an alchemical sense is, like most of the Great Work stages, an act of purification. Prior to purifying the work you must first purify the self, which is accomplished through an inward approach, like the individual undergoing the Hero’s Journey stages, to the ‘inmost cave’ (an analogy for facing doubts and fears). But what one finds upon self-reflection is not always what is expected or what is desired. It is easy at this stage to become withdrawn in the process of trying to purify and better oneself.

\(^ {66}\) I have spoken already of photography’s early history (see III. FIXATION); of the ubiquitous human desire for remembrance which drives the advancement of image-capturing technologies, and of the tangible photographic object as an embodiment of the ‘real’. The analogue/digital dichotomy is the logical follow on from these themes.
Alongside rapid growth of image-capturing technology since the 1980s there have been significant changes to the ways we view and share images. Photographic images have come to largely determine our perception of reality, prized as substitutes for firsthand experience. The widespread digitisation of our everyday images heralds an era which some refer to as a ‘post-photographic’ technological revolution. Since the early Modern period and the rise of Industrialism, the development of burgeoning technology of imaging and representation has been conflated with changing attitudes toward what is accepted as the ‘real’. It makes sense, then, that significant changes in a technology closely tied with everyday perception has been sensed as an “epochal change”. Nietzsche’s notion of the “death of god” tells us that aesthetics is linked inherently to the changing perception of human experience; we once thought the world unknowable, but now believe the world exists for the purpose of being known through human thought.

The digital or post-photographic era heralds anxieties relating to a loss of the ‘real’; hyperreality, virtual worlds, cyberspace, artificial intelligence and cyborgs. The idea of human/machine hybridity in the production of images is of interest to me as a photographer.

67 Known as the ‘Computer Age’, this describes the period of time in the twenty first century (but beginning in the twentieth century) characterised by the rapid shift of an economy based on traditional industry to one based on information technology. “Information Age,” Wikipedia, accessed October 11, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age#Computers.
70 Amelia Jones, Self/Image; Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.
71 Lister, ed., The photographic Image in Digital Culture, 1.
72 This refers to a lost universal belief in a transcendent guarantor, substituted instead with human-made objects (such as photographs).
73 Jones, Self/Image, 10.
74 Lister, ed., The photographic Image in Digital Culture, 1-2.
who works entirely with analogue images which are mediated by digital technology. When I develop my photographs, I am required to digitally scan them in order to see the positive image, in order to print the image and apply it to cloth, and in order to share the image online where it will reach the most people. “In the digital era we can no longer be assured of a preexisting referent [in images] to which the signifier can pretend to be attached.” No longer is there, nor can there be, a simple signifier(photo)/signified(subject) opposition; analogue photographs take on meaning through spatial distance, the physicality of the gap between subject and viewer ‘proves’ the subject’s existence.

The notion of techno-cultural revolution has been widely accepted and celebrated by cultural critics and practitioners...The fact that technological development is seen as some kind of transcendent and autonomous force—rather than what it really is, that is to say embedded in a whole array of social institutions and organisations—also works to reduce what is, in reality, a highly complex and uneven process of change to an abstract and schematic teleology of ‘progress’. The idea of a revolution in this context serves to intensify contrasts between past (bad) and future (good)...

In the above quotation we see echoes of not only Modernism but also of the alchemical Great Work, both of which ideologically centre around the conflation of past/bad and future/good. In our contemporary post-modern period we automatically associate the digital with future and the non-digital with the past. I would propose that we think of both technologies as part of our future; according to alchemy, anything can be made better, so why discard any of our functioning technologies? However, I am by no means anti-digital. Within my practice I think of myself as becoming a sort of human/machine hybrid producing images as products of my craft; I work with both the physical (analogue) and the virtual (digital) and both are necessary to achieve what I work towards. I do not feel human/machine like Stelarc. I feel human/machine like a camera through my lenses, my memory card, my shutter and my rewind. I truly hope to hone and fine-tune myself into something amazing.

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75 Jones, Self/Image, 19.

76 Jones, Self/Image, 19.

77 Lister, ed., The photographic Image in Digital Culture, 30.

78 As stated previously, I rely on digital technologies to realise my own photographic work- and there are many artists who produce incredible, thoughtful digital artworks, so I am not against the digital.
VIII. SEPARATION // ORDEAL // ODD BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES

Separation: The matter becomes black; then the separation of the elements begin…changes into vapour; this is the earth that becomes water. That water condenses and falls back onto the earth, and makes it white; that whiteness is the air. After whiteness redness comes, that is air that becomes fire…

VIII. Of two minds and of two selves…and now comes the most challenging of all trials: reconciling the known self with the self known to others; that self which can never truly be known.79 There exists within Western aesthetics a centralised, oppositional complex of mind separated from body, which implies an urgent need for the individual to bridge this gap in order to understand the self.80 The nature of photographic image, existing within the world, is paralleled in the same way- the gap between it and the world must also be bridged. In this way, the individual is analogous to the image. Kantian aesthetics attempt to bridge these gaps, relying on cognitive fantasy to correlate the idea of the subject with

79 The separation of elements reflects the separation of the self which is perceived to be true by the individual and the self which is perceived by others. This realisation of oppositional selves may end up being the biggest ordeal of the entire process, and it does not always end the way we want. This can cause odd behavioural changes noticed and commented on by those around us, furthering the gap between the known self and the self perceived by others.

80 Jones, Self/Image, 8.
the subject itself:

If Kantian aesthetics is about bridging the gap between the image and its referent in the “real world”, between the making and viewing subject, between the subjective and objective, then meaning-making in Euro-American culture is dominated in general by parallel systems of bridging the gap between the sign [photograph] and its referent [subject photographed]...Kant’s model never resolved the gap between the subjective and objective worlds except through wilful imposition of the transcendental.81

In contrast to this, postmodernism saw a replacement of the ‘gap’ with the notion of the ‘society of the spectacle’, in which “the scene [sign] and the mirror [referent] no longer exist; instead, there is a screen [image] and network [world of viewers].”82 The spectacle (i.e. the photographic image) has come to replace reality (that which was photographed), in the same way that Barthes theorised the subconscious replacement of memory by photographs (see III. FIXATION). Baudrillard suggests that this loss of the referent also indicates a loss of the body- so how, then, is the body to be understood?83 Physically, the body is still there, and we can prove that with a photograph. It is our understanding of the body that is so mystified. Luckily, we have the photographic portrait and self portrait, which have both since their early existence functioned as both a description of the individual as well as an inscription of social identity (again reflecting the gap between the known self and how the self is perceived by others).84 The body is the mediator between inner and outer experience, between memory and perception. The body within the photographic image, then, functions in a similar way: “The photographic self image, analogical and indexical as it may begin as being, turns inside out (chiasmically) the bonds that bind us to the world of things by showing that they are subjects too.”85 In other words, the photographic portrait or self portrait at once reduces you (your represented body) to an object, while also freeing you of objectification since it isn’t really ‘you’ in the image but an avatar, projected onto paper or screen, of you. Barthes referred to this phenomena as “a micro-version of death”; “that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object.”86

Is photographing the self therefore an attempt to understand the self, even though the photograph serves only to further the gap between mind and body, between image and world? In any portrait, self or not, there is a perceived promise to reveal and document the subject, but this perception is inherently flawed as it is impossible to truly ‘know’ the

81 Jones, Self/Image, 13.
82 Jones, Self/Image, 17.
84 Tagg, The Burden of Representation, 37.
86 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 14.
subject from the image alone. Jacques Lacan famously depicted the notion of a reciprocal gaze between the subject and viewer in his book *What is a Picture*, 1964 (Fig #10).

The image- the ‘screen’- mediates the gaze between the subject photographed and the viewer who sees them. The description of the image as a screen implies a two-dimensionality; it is “corporeality-as-surface” (the intangible made touchable):

The photograph is like the skin that envelopes our corporeality in that it indicates or presupposes interiority...the photographic portrait is only apparently skin deep...leading, through metaphor as well as neurotransmitters, to the cognitive and emotive ‘depths’ of the subject.87

How, then, can we know the self in the image, when it at once presents us with information but acts as a physical barrier which keeps us from the subject?

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87 Jones, *Self/Image*, 64.
Incineration: action where more and more mercury is added to the matter which is becoming sulphur, be it to multiply it, be it to make the perfect elixir.

Sometimes it is only through destruction that a rebirth can occur. Born again from ash, the greatest of treasures: a chance to rewrite the self. This process is highly intrapersonal, and takes places almost entirely within the mind. Writer Mark Freeman introduces us to the notion of a “history-memory-narrative triad” that denotes the three major elements which make up self-perception in the individual (Fig. #11).

We are finally beginning to come to the end of the journey. By this point what we have undergone has in some way changed us— we now possess something additional that we did not at the beginning. Similarly, the Alchemist adds more of one thing during INCINERATION in order to alter the product. Our change, our rebirth, is a reward, earned by hard work. But when we change do we still know ourselves? Or will we end up feeling depersonalised, like the photographer who tries to know themselves through their own self portrait? A photograph is thought to take (or steal) something from the subject being photographed.

History refers to things said and done. This can be recorded in the form of images, videos, written text, etc. Histories are mostly objective, but can be influenced by memory. Memory, as we know from Barthes (see III. FIXATION), is highly subjective and interpretive. Memories are our tools for recounting and comprehending our histories. They can be influenced by the factual data of our documented histories and, unlike histories, can be altered as time passes. History and memory each affect the other; Barthes knew this, too:

...memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument. But by making the (mortal) Photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of "what has been," modern society has renounced the Monument. A paradox: the same century invented History and Photography. But History is a memory fabricated according to positive formulas, a pure intellectual discourse which abolishes mythic Time; and the Photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony...91

Last is narrative, the self we think inwardly of as our ‘true’ self, and which we present outwardly through actions and speech; the self which “we ourselves have fashioned through our own reflective imagination”.92 Through autobiographical work we are able to rewrite our own narrative selves- i.e. work about ourself, made by us. Biographical work functions inherently differently, since it is written from another’s perspective who outwardly views the subject’s narrative self but can never truly know it. Autobiographical work is unique because the individual must critically examine, justify and verbalise/visualise/textualise their own narrative self. The notion of ‘rewriting’ the self may seem deceitful or illusory, but this is not always the case (though it is of course possible). Truth itself is interpretive.93 Compare the following two images (Figs. 12 and 13):

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90 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 91.
91 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 93.
92 Freeman, Rewriting the Self, 5.
93 This has been discussed in III. FIXATION, in relation to Realism and the idea of truth in photographic images.
One a painting (interpretive rendition), the other a photograph (objective realisation). Renaissance art, such as Caravaggio’s here, has come to be viewed and understood as the manifestation of a human subject, or as self-imaging.\textsuperscript{94} If we understand paintings like this as artist’s depictions of their own narrative selves through allegorical metaphor, what is the difference between this rendition of \textit{Narcissus} and Cindy Sherman’s well known \textit{Untitled Film Still #2}? While Sherman is physically present in the photograph, she is not photographing ‘herself’, but a persona for the purpose of creating meaning in an image. Conversely, Caravaggio is not present in his painted image but it is thought that many of his early works are symbolic self portraits.\textsuperscript{95} The idea of selfhood correlated with images and representation is something which has characterised the Modern period, enabled by ever-advancing representational technologies.\textsuperscript{96} Time advances continuously; we are always longing for the past (through images) or peering ahead into future (through imagined renditions) but rarely is our focus on the present. Narrative reflection, though illusory, sanctions a “more comprehensive and expansive conception of truth itself”.\textsuperscript{97} Simply assuming deceit denies us the chance to explore “historical truth itself in a deeper and more comprehensive way than is often allowed” which is vital for thinking and operating independently from hierarchal institutional bodies of knowledge (see II. \textbf{COAGULATION}, VI.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{narcissus.jpg}
\caption{Michaelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio’s \textit{Narcissus}, 1597-99. Oil on canvas, 110 x 92 cm. Source: flatbed scan taken from \textit{Jones, Self/Image}, 2.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{cindy-sherman.jpg}
\caption{Cindy Sherman’s \textit{Untitled Film Still #2}, 1977. Gelatin silver print, 24.1x19.2cm. Source: flatbed scan taken from \textit{Jones, Self/Image}, 45.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{94} It was during the European Renaissance that notions of ‘the artist’ and ‘the individual’ began to emerge. \textit{Jones, Self/Image}, 1-3.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Jones, Self/Image}, 2.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Jones, Self/Image}, 5.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Freeman, Rewriting the Self}, 32.
DISTILLATION) In alchemy the notion of (figuratively) killing off and rebirthing the self though one’s Great Work is symbolised by the ‘ouroboros’- the snake or serpent eating it’s own tail (Fig. 14):

The dragon is probably the oldest pictorial symbol in alchemy of which we have documentary evidence. It appears as the οὐροβόρος [ouroboros], the tail-eater…together with the legend: ἕν τὸ πᾶν (the One, the All). Time and time again the alchemists reiterate that the opus proceeds from the one and leads back to the one, that it is a sort of circle like a dragon biting its own tail. For this reason the opus was often called circular...as dragon he [the practitioner] devours himself and as dragon he dies, to rise again as the lapis [philosophical gold].

Likewise, Intrapersonal attempts to break down, critically examine, and rebuild the sense of self. This process is not just a linear one, starting at A and ending at B, but is cyclical and will continue after this project, much like the ouroboros.

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98 Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 33.

99 Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 293.
Fermentation: the work at the red colour phase is a sulphur or a very subtle earth, very warm and dry; she hides in her interior very abundant natural fire...This sulphur multiplies itself from the same matter of which it has been created, according to the intention of the Artist.

X. Staying fixed in one place is not an option. In retrospect, was it ever? The fire inside burns hotter than ever and there is road still yet to cover.¹⁰⁰

During the latter half of the twentieth century ‘language and art’ as a theme become more prevalent, following on from early twentieth century readymades.¹⁰¹ We readily associate early readymades with Duchamp’s Fountain, 1917, likely the most famous example of a readymade. The impact of readymades on artistic practice lies in their controversial blurring of boundaries between perceived highbrow and lowbrow art.¹⁰² Readymades were and are not always sculptural objects; oftentimes found photographs have been used as readymades. The addition of text to a photograph significantly alters its meaning.¹⁰³ This is because text and imagery read quite differently to one another.

¹⁰⁰ *The road back* calls to the individual and it is time to move, though feelings of inner emptiness may ferment, or slow, our movements. It can be difficult, feel difficult, to continue on with a project sometimes, particularly if that project has been at the forefront of our attention for the greater part of a year and we have lost some of our confidence in our abilities to complete it. But time is undeniable and slows for nobody. The work will be completed no matter our feelings, our energy levels, our habits. The end product shines like a beacon in the darkness and provides a path to follow.


¹⁰² Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., *Photo Text Text Photo*, 7.

¹⁰³ Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., *Photo Text Text Photo*, 9.
Insomuch as text relies on sequential chronology in order to be read and understood, photographic images operate outside of linear time. Unless there is text present to provide context for an image, or visual clues within the image itself, it could have been taken anywhere, at any time- “the image (photo) provides an ambiguous and therefore vague framework of associations.”

Within semiological theory, text is thought to occupy a “zero position”, or neutral position; the words already have agreed upon meaning which allows it to operate as “expression[s] of unambiguous, substantive meaning.” An image, however, is thought of in semiology as “a continuum of signs with unclearly specified meanings, which derives its structure only from the projection of possible meaning (in the form of language) onto it.” Therefore, an image unaccompanied by text (within or alongside it) is able to unambiguously define the subject in its visual manifestation, but cannot make assumptions with reliability or certainty about the subject.

When supplemented by text, both image and text are altered. “Photo-text combination oversteps the boundaries of genre, which...clearly distinguish between painting (in its manifestation of simultaneity) and text (in its reliance upon chronological sequence).” The photograph exclusively is perceived as a direct ‘truthful’ representation of the world, and so the addition of text is far more contentious since it is possible for the text to deceive the viewer of the image’s ‘true’ meaning. Text can operate harmoniously alongside an image by specifying its contents, or discordantly by purposefully misleading the viewer’s interpretation of the image’s contents. In some works, text neither confirms nor denies the contents. Such works usually read as “immaterial”, as the conceptual aspects have become more important than the physical ones. Conceptual artist Robert Barry produced many photo-text artworks during the 1970s which achieved such an effect.

One such work, Jim with Green Frame and Black Words, 1992, uses text to disrupt an otherwise conventional, contemporary portrait (Fig. 15). Overlaid words imply a sense of urgency, as if there is some meaning that is desperate to come across to the reader but which the displacement of text doesn’t allow. I personally find myself trying to catalogue each word and turn it into a sentence, paying more attention to this than to the subject. Some words fade into the shadows or are cut off by the frame; one word is half swallowed by the black in the subject’s collar and we are left to guess at its meaning. The artwork’s title also throws us off- it implies a green frame but the frame we see is grey.

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104 Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., Photo Text Text Photo, 10.
105 Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., Photo Text Text Photo, 10.
106 Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., Photo Text Text Photo, 10.
107 Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., Photo Text Text Photo, 10.
108 Painting is referenced here because of its representational nature; like a photographic image, a painted image is altered by the addition of text. Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., Photo Text Text Photo, 9.
109 Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., Photo Text Text Photo, 12.
Techniques such as these are things that I hope to achieve in *Intrapersonal*. I want for the presence of text not to confuse but to allude, imply, and extend. To what exactly my images and words allude is up to the interpretation of the viewer, whose perception will always be influenced by their own experiences and knowledge which they bring to the artwork.

FIG. #15
Robert Barry’s *Jim with Green Frame and Black Words* 1992
Ink and acrylic on photograph
66 x 66 cm
Source: Hapkemeyer and Weirmair, eds., *Photo Text Text Photo*, 43.
XI. MULTIPLICATION // RESURRECTION // DEPRESSION

Multiplication: operation of the Great Work during which the powder of projection is being multiplied, be it in quality, or quantity into infinity according to the liking of the Artist.

As above, so below. As I gaze into the mirror I see nothing; I peer unto the image and I see something incredible, worth knowing. I would like to use this penultimate section to momentarily slow the momentum of the paper and briefly look back in reflection on my reasoning for employing alchemical theory as the analogical backbone of my research.

High magic is also known as hermetic magic because it is based on the hermetic arts and sciences. These are so named because they are derived from the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus (thrice greatest Hermes), the many-named genius of magic who mediates between the macrocosm and the microcosm…The Great Work is nothing less than the achievement of godhood- union with the divine- using the three pillars of alchemy, magic and astrology to do so.

\[\text{Following the logic of the hermeticist’s “as above, so below”, the mirroring of the macrocosmic manifesting as the microcosmic is a form of MULTIPLICATION. When something is MULTIPLIED, is the newer iteration necessarily an improvement upon the old one? What happens when the MULTIPLIED are too similar; like having many photographs of the same subject. MULTIPLICATION has the power to either emphasise meaning through repetition- resurrecting the image- or dilute it. At times, such repetition can be depressing…it can make the photographer’s future feel bleak.}\]

Hermetic magic believes in an ideological principle which underlies all aspects of its practice: “as above, so below.” What this refers to is the notion that the macrocosm (universe) mirrors the microcosm (individual); for example, heaven mirrors earth, and humankind mirrors god(s), just as a photograph mirrors the world around it. It is thought that ‘the world’ (what exists outside of the individual) is simply a mirror of our own inner worlds, and that the boundary between the two is arbitrary, if not non-existent, meaning that self and other are really one and the same. Truly and deeply understanding the self would thus indicate an understanding of the world and how it works- “What is the adage of the philosophers? Know thyself! This refers to the intellectual and cognitive mirror. And what is this mirror if not the Divine and original Intellect? When a man looks at himself and sees himself in this, he turns away...[and] becomes a perfect man.”

The tools we use to accomplish this include, to name a few, symbols/language (for example, in written texts), divinatory processes (‘textbook’ occult objects like tarot cards, crystal balls, etc.), and technologies of representation such as photography which allow us to capture and examine the worlds’ contents. It is for this reason that I choose to continue centralising photography within my practice.

Using analogy to explore the self is not a new idea; as mentioned in X. FERMENTATION, artists have used art to self-image, if not necessarily self-portray, since the Renaissance, when the concept of the individual was still a new one. Likewise, the hermetic alchemists have always seen the individual (consisting of spirit, soul and body) as a reflection of and a vessel which contains part of the universe, indivisible from it. Objects in the material universe, such as various metals, are also thought of as similar in essence (having all “sprung from the same seed in the womb of Nature”), but they are not all seen as equally matured.

This is where the notion of transmuting lead into gold, likely the most well known concept within alchemy, came from. Whether or not it is physically possible, it is the idea of having the power to better something that is so striking, so appealing. This, and most every other aspect of alchemy, is always at its core about the process of becoming better. This is the characteristic of alchemy which I have applied, through analogy, to myself, my writing, my research and my artwork.

Gold symbolised the highest development in Nature and as an element came to personify human renewal or regeneration. A ‘golden’ human being was one who was resplendent with spiritual beauty and who had triumphed over temptations and the lurking power of evil. By way of contrast, the most base of all the metals, lead, represented the sinful and unrepentant human who continued to wallow in sin and was readily overcome by the forces of darkness.

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112 Nevill Drury, Everyday Magic; Affirmations, meditations and magic (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 32.
113 Drury, Everyday Magic, 32.
114 Drury, Everyday Magic, 32.
I have not yet reached my ‘golden’, or peak, state- I don’t believe that many people have. The process is ongoing and continues for the duration of our conscious lifespan. My artwork and writing use/include the entire twelve stages, indicating a complete process, but this is for the purpose of conveying the analogy. Throughout the entire process of writing this paper and simultaneously and the making of *Intrapersonal* I have rigorously examined myself and questioned my own motives. This process has honestly required a lot of me, but I feel that I am in the process of bettering myself for it.

We are almost there.
XII. PROJECTION // RETURN // BURNOUT SYNDROME

Projection: The Hermetic Philosophers call their projection powder, a powder which is the result of their Art, that they project in very small quantity onto the imperfect metals in fusion, by means of which they get transmuted in gold or silver, according to the degree of its perfection.

XII. The obscure by the more obscure, the unknown by the more unknown! Still I barely know myself...still I learn, still I burn, still I am reborn- but do I ever change?115 This final section is about failure.

Success and failure are difficult to define, as the way we perceive these as a static model is dictated according to capitalist, colonialist and heteronormative hegemonies. Success in this conventional sense is conflated with “specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation,” i.e., success equals production or reproduction (of objects, influence, children) followed by gain (of capital, power, reward) directly resulting from that (re)production.116 Failure, then, is any alternative to (re)production and gain- but it is not necessarily something negative. In fact, it is binarised ways of thinking such as positive/negative, good/bad, winner/loser, etc. which failure combats, as it

115 The first sentence about obscurantism and the unknown is the English translation of a Latin phrase (‘Obscurum per obscurius, ignotum per ignotius!’) found in C. G. Jung’s Psychology and Alchemy. This was alchemy’s “method of explanation”; i.e. it is heavily speculated that the leading cause of alchemy’s ‘death’ in the age of enlightenment was due to the intensely secretive methods by which practitioners guarded their knowledge, even from other alchemists. I PROJECT this phrase unto my own feelings of not ‘knowing’ the self, as well as cycles of metaphorical death and rebirth (through occult imagery, because like the individual undertaking the Hero’s Journey I just can’t resist returning to what I know). In the last section of this journey I question myself- am I actually learning anything with each cycle? At this stage the Hero returns to the their ordinary world all the wiser for having undertaken their trials, but all I feel at this stage is burnt out, and in more ways than one- physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially, metaphorically and literally. The completion of this paper marks the completion of an Honours degree, the completion of the longest written work I have ever produced, and the completion of a stage in my life. All I can do now is continue to try, Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, 227.

relieves the individual of obligatory norms of human behavioural management.\textsuperscript{117} “While failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects…it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (toxic positivity here referring to a Western, particularly US-centric, attitude that failure only happens to people who don’t try ‘hard enough’).\textsuperscript{118}

Alchemy is, historically, a failure. “Perished in its own obscurity” and “incompatible with the spirit of enlightenment”, eighteenth century alchemists turned away from the spirit sciences and instead towards Hermetic philosophy and the dawning natural science of chemistry.\textsuperscript{119} Today, the image of the alchemist correlates with that of the witch or wizard; fantastical figures of narrative, despite having been very real practitioners as recently as three centuries ago. Contemporarily, alchemy is generally thought of in an entirely conceptual way, as a metaphor for human transformation through spiritual purification.\textsuperscript{120} This is a wilful \textbf{PROJECTION} of meaning onto a framework of knowledge. I myself have \textbf{PROJECTED} alchemical theory onto my work and practice in order to self reflect.

I have noticed a theme of inevitable failure in photographic practices like my own (as in, self-reflective and darkroom-based). A photograph of the self or another person is an indexical trace of that subject; it translates the body to object (thus making it ‘knowable’ since it can be captured). In this representative process the mind/body are ‘separated’ (since it is impossible to capture the mind in the image). The photograph’s ability to impose narrative by isolating its subject of context (see IX. \textbf{INCINERATION}) allows the possibility of the image’s originally intended meaning to become lost in translation. Thus the photograph itself has ‘failed’ in the conventional sense of the word. But consider the constant change and transmutation taking place within all things- in every cycle of failure and renewal there exists the potential for growth and betterment. Does failure, ruin, ending, have to be melancholic?

An illustrative example of this is the thirteenth card of the tarot deck, ‘Death’ (Figs. 16 and 17). It is often perceived as a negative or unlucky image, but its divinatory meaning aligns with transformation, major change, and the opportunity for life renewed.\textsuperscript{121} If the Death card represents the microcosmic reflection of all macrocosmic failures, ruins, and endings that take place in the physical world, does the photograph’s affect of ‘micro-death’ (as Barthes puts it; see VIII. \textbf{SEPARATION}) parallel this by reflecting back to us all our perceived macrocosmic failings on a microcosmic scale? And more pertinently, does this have to be a bad thing? Almost all the images used in Intrapersonal and thus at the start of each section throughout this paper contain some kind of error or mistake-overexposed, out of focus, too dark, too dusty, etc. This doesn’t stop them from effectively reflecting myself, nor has it stopped me from using them as tools to better understand myself.

\textsuperscript{117} Halberstam, \textit{The Queer Art of Failure}, 3.

\textsuperscript{118} Halberstam, \textit{The Queer Art of Failure}, 3.

\textsuperscript{119} Jung, \textit{Psychology and Alchemy}, 227.

\textsuperscript{120} Drury, \textit{Everyday Magic}, 34.

\textsuperscript{121} Melville, \textit{The Secrets of High Magic}, 62.
After all- “failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.”122

Conclusion
(Or: XIII. The Close, but not The End)

There are two overarching aims of this paper, As Above, So Below: Traversing the Self through Images, Objects and Alchemy. The first aim has been to systematically guide both the reader and myself through the realm of mythology and meaning invented and put forth in Intrapersonal. The word “intrapersonal” refers to a series of communications which take place entirely within one’s own mind. The artwork is a manifestation or visualisation of these communications, and the paper acts as a reference point from which the communications can be perceived and understood by those outside of the body of original communications.

The second aim has been justification of methods and ideas; again, not just for the reader but for myself as well. If Intrapersonal is about navigating and better understanding my self, then the paper’s main function must be to explain how and why this has been accomplished. I have placed myself in the position of the practitioner; of the alchemist/artist. I have carried out my research, my experimentations, my evocations, just as the alchemist practices their craft, hunched over the alembic flame. The entire Great Work process has required the fragmentation and critical examination of knowledge which I assumed to be truth in order to gain a deeper understanding of myself, the world, and how I perceive both of these. This de-occulting of knowledge has been characterised by a delve into the realm of occult theory.

From here, the path branches off- throughout this project it has been relatively straightforward, but I am now faced with the burden of responsibility which comes with growing older and expanding one’s realm of knowledge. I am interested in continuing to explore the occulting and de-occulting of knowledge as a major theme in my work and writing, through the lens of alchemy or some other body of knowledge. I plan to continue to work towards my own opus, for through this I am sure to continue to transmute myself into something bigger, better, older, golden.

Thank you so much for reading.
Bibliography


