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RESEARCH PAPER

MAKING AND PERFORMANCE - CORPOREAL TRANSFORMATIONS

By
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Abstract

This research documents the process of making objects for the purpose of performance. It explores the significance that performance generates for the objects, the artist and the audience. The creative works examined include *David, Mark Making Tools* and *Lines of Flight*. These were produced and submitted during my candidature for the Masters of Fine Arts at the Sydney College of the Arts between 2009 and 2012. They are a combination of performance, object making and installation, which use processes of metal smithing, body piercing and documentation. On a gross level, the works generate physical transformations. More subtly, these physical changes are hopefully a catalyst for emotional, perceptual and conceptual changes. This document tracks some of those changes. It also addresses problems raised by the nature of live art, to do with the nature of liveness, the role of documentation and the social production of bodies through processes of inscription.
Introduction

Making and performance; corporeal transformation

This research documents the process of making objects for the purpose of performance. It explores the significance that performance generates for the objects, the artist and the audience. The creative works examined are a combination of performance, object making and installation, which use processes of metal smithing, body piercing and documentation.

On a gross level, the works generate physical transformations. More subtly, these physical changes are hopefully a catalyst for emotional, perceptual and conceptual changes. Each performance is unique, comprised of individual participants, tools and situations. Thus the transformations they may generate are numerous and unpredictable. As it is impossible to examine every transformation, the scope of this research document is limited to select events and outcomes. These select events and outcomes are examples of the larger premise, that the physical changes that bodies undergo in the process of performing with objects generate more subtle emotional, perceptual and conceptual changes.

Commonly defined, performance is the process of carrying out or accomplishing an action. Making is the process of producing something, usually an object. The works investigated challenge these discreet definitions since making and performance always overlap in the works. This overlapping is a zone of indeterminability, located at the intersection between making and performance. This zone is productive of transformations; it is the locus of art. Moreover, the making event and performance event are not rehearsed. Their unrehearsed nature places the works in the sphere of ‘live art’ within performance art.

The creative works examined employ a broad scope of the meaning of ‘liveness’ to reach in and touch an audience at a visceral level. On one level the audience is present to a live body (the artist) and this fits the traditional definition of liveness. However, I contend that even when the body of the artist is replaced by documentation, seen in some of the works examined, the work may still be interpreted as performance art, living or live art.

Documentation is a crucial aspect of the works produced throughout the research. Projection, audio and digital images were employed to depict the different types of transformation that took place during the making and the performance events. The transformations produced were observed with and without an audience and always documented for subsequent works. Documentation allows the performance work and making event to exist beyond the moment of action and is often relied upon to transport the work from a private to a public space. The installation works contain the documentation of the performance event. The documentation affects a sense of aliveness in the audience toward the work.\(^2\)

‘Live art’ often produces documentation and as a result new artworks and critique are produced. This aspect is illustrated in all the works investigated through their development that relied on the creative output from earlier works. The transformative potential of the works is transferred to installations from the performance because of the liveness that is contained and passed on in the documentation. The transformative potential is the works ability to either physically transform or emotionally alter the artist and the audience in ways that are observable and illustrated throughout the research document. The making, installation and performance events explore these transformations, connections and encounters between the various forces that act on bodies.\(^3\)

The performances explore forces, which are applied to artist’s body in different ways using an assemblage of customized objects. The piercing, suspending, propelling of objects and cutting pressure are all forces investigated and performed on the body in the works examined. Mark Making Tools\(^4\) cuts the skin, Lines of Flight\(^5\) suspends the body from stainless steel hooks pierced into the skin and David\(^6\) propels glass arrows towards a breastplate affixed by piercings. These bodily transformations are an expression of forces that can be physically unperceivable or perceivable, such as gravity, pressure, friction, and

\(^2\) Oxford University Press. “Alive [is defined as] not only living, not dead but also (of a feeling or quality) continuing in existence and the continuing to be supported or in use”. Oxford Dictionaries Online (2012), http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/alive (accessed Feb 26, 2012).

\(^3\) Oxford University Press. “Encounter [is defined as] [with object] as an unexpectedly experience or be faced with (something difficult or hostile”. Oxford Dictionaries Online (2012), http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/encounter (accessed Feb 26, 2012).

\(^4\) See catalogue of Work Presented for Examination for Mark Making Tools installation details.


\(^6\) See catalogue of Work Presented for Examination for David installation details.
social forces like cultural or familial imperatives. The works are intended to make the imperceptible forces perceivable.

My research methodology is grounded in a reflective engagement with the performance of objects and my observations and feelings as a performer. This subjective engagement informs a conceptual framework that draws connections between the bodies, the re-contextualization of materials like skin, blood and steel, forces and the subjective transformations that the processes of making and performance entail.

All of the works examined disrupt conventional assumptions about the roles and capacities of bodies. I believe this exposes possibilities for the body. For example the audience observe the stretch and strength of the skin as the body of the artist hangs from the hooks. The visible changes that occur are a response to the gravitational force on the body in suspension. If audiences could see how strong skin is then they may ask themselves, what else is their skin capable of doing? What else is possible in their own lives? The performances expose these possibilities by highlighting the forces that act on bodies, for example the effects of gravity upon the skin of a suspended body.
Australian performance artist Stelarc who used flesh hook suspension explained his suspensions in a similar way, as creating "gravitational landscapes."\(^7\)

![Figure 1 Stelarc Sitting / swaying rock suspension event 1980](image)

My suspensions share this, however they build on Stelarc’s work because the sensations of suspension are an important part of my work whereas he disavowed the sensations. Stelarc states about his suspension performance that, “[t]hey are realized with neither the intention of initiation rites nor the S&M\(^8\) exploration of pain and pleasure.”\(^9\) The exploration of sensation is important in my suspension performances because this is where the potential for emotional and physical transformation resides. The interaction with other feeling bodies is where this potential for transformation is located, which takes place within a liminal zone. This is where potential outcomes are created through encounters between different feeling bodies through performance. The bodies involved in a performance event have the roles of performer, audience and maker. They experience, interact, connect and reflect upon each other creating encounters where transformation can take place.

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The paper opens with an in depth description of the three major works. The descriptions of the works are followed by three chapters. *Be the force* – the use of materials, *See the forces* – living art, inscription and documentation and *Feel the forces* – Interaction and suspension.

Figure 2 The works examined include David, Mark Making Tools and Lines of Flight

*David* is a piercing and propelling performance work that is about giving a new voice to the experience of the sudden death of a loved one. *David* is discussed in terms of an alternative vocality for the body to express grief in a non-verbal form. *Mark Making Tools* is an assemblage of sculpted tools designed to cut an inscription into skin and the documentation of their making and use combined in an installation. The work is discussed in terms of liveness and inscription. The use of inscription as a result of forces and re-inscription in *Mark Making Tools* was developed from the early work *Palimpsest*.10 *Mark Making Tools* also opens up a discussion on the use of surgical steel and handmade scalpel type tools. Here they function as performance objects re-located from the medical context to a performance context, opening up a very different dialogue between object and a body.

*Lines of Flight* was developed from the work *Intimacy Through Proximity*.11 Both illustrate the combining of forces and the creation of a turning point, a pivoting point or fulcrum where balance is played with using gravity and resistance. The differentiating aspect of the work *Lines of Flight* is that the active soliciting of help from the audience for the action to happen is necessary. This opens a discussion about the audience as participant,

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10 See appendix A for *Palimpsest* details.
11 See appendix A for *Intimacy Through Proximity* details.
enacted through the work.

The subtitling of the chapters refers to the stage of awareness of forces. The forces are absorbed in *Be the force* in the piercing and propelling of objects towards the artist’s body to create a new voice for the body, which is explored in the work *David*. Here, forces are recognized, harnessed and re-directed to manifest as a new force giving a voice to the unspeakable experience of death. The encounter with materials in the process of making, shaping metal creates a sense that I as a maker can *be the force* to create transformation. The forces are felt and explored in the suspending and extending of the artist’s body in the work *Mark Making Tools*. The forces are seen as inscription by the cutting of the skin’s surface as this is explored in the work *Lines of Flight*.

The first chapter, *Be the force* focuses, in part, on a discussion around encountering materials in the process of making objects for performance. This focus indicates the importance of making as an encounter in the works specifically through the materials. The materials include stainless steel, blood, skin, bodies as objects and sculptural objects as tools. The power of the image of blood being produced from a body through interacting with objects in the course of a performance opens the discussion of the transformative potential when materials are encountered. The transformative potential is the conceptual framework for critically discussing all the works investigated. The chapter discusses the use of the body as an object that serves to challenge the concept of a subject object dualism. This opens up the idea that the body is a location for change.
The work of 1960’s blood based performance artist Gina Pane will also be mentioned in terms of her statement that she creates a new language in her performances.

“In the end it wasn’t the amount of pain which concerned me but the language of these signs. My real problem was in constructing a language through this wound which became [a] sign” 12

This initiates a discussion of the connectedness of corporeal and emotional transformation.

Chapter two, See the forces, examines documentation and its relationship to liveness and what constitutes live art. This introduces the concept of inscription and the idea that forces act on a body to create those inscriptions. This opens the idea of using those same forces but redirecting them, and the concept of rewriting the body. Pippa Brush argues that the body is an inscribed palimpsest. Franz Kafka’s law-machine, called the Harrow in his short story, In the Penal colony13, and Michel De Chateau’s ‘tools of inscription’ will be discussed in relation to inscription and the law as a force.14

Chapter three, *Feel the Forces*, develops the concept of forces acting on the body through focusing on the suspension work *Lines of Flight*. This chapter introduces Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept that bodies are comprised of forces. The chapter discusses the forces that act on bodies and identifies the different forces manipulated within the work. The relationship between social and physical forces will be explored. This establishes a space for a new understanding of the interrelationship of forces that can act on bodies. The chapter will also describe flesh hook suspensions and flesh pulls as a mode of performance. This will lead to an analysis of the performing relationship between materials, objects and bodies. The chapter develops the concept of transformation to explore its location on and within the body when interacting with objects during performance and making. The chapter will close with a discussion of the complicit audience and processes of identification and empathy, considered as an output of that interaction. This demonstrates one way that blood based performance and installation work creates potential emergent futures through transformation.

The conclusions refocus, in part, on the site or location where forces act on objects and bodies. This section also recapitulates the transformative potential of all the works investigated.
The works

David

David is about the creation of sculptural objects that require a physical endurance of an action or force, which enables the body to find a new voice for grief, in a modified way, through performance. The objects are socially inscribed symbols of warfare relocated in the work to redirect their meaning. David is comprised of a number of objects including a stainless steel bow, a quiver of glass arrows and a shield like breastplate with the relief of a heart forged on the stainless steel surface. The bow, arrows and breastplate were traditionally used to protect and impale. They are repositioned as a stainless steel bow, glass arrows and a breastplate attached with pain causing fixtures. The force of the warfare inscription of those symbols is relocated by being worn through the skin using them in a way to express the extreme emotion of grief, which is a new expression of that force. The objects in the assemblage are made from materials contradictory to their conventional use. They are used with a new, divergent purpose to effectively 'be the force' that can act to transform through the art-encounter.
The mortality of the body is understood through the materiality of the body in David. Through making and performance I encounter the materials glass, steel and my own skin. I explore and utilize their materiality to express how I felt about my brothers’ death. The exploration of materiality underpins the work and opens channels of communication or connections for the audience. The performance entailed piercing the breastplate to my chest with three long skewers. The glass arrows were then propelled toward the breastplate, where they shattered. The process of making the breastplate and using the glass arrows to perform in this specialized way was recorded in private. The footage was installed as documentation along with the objects, which became relics.¹⁵ From its inception the work was about making the objects to be performed in a specific way as a response to my brothers sudden death. He died in a motorcycle accident where there was fatal damage to his heart without breaking the skin of his body from the impact. My brother died literally of a broken heart, invisibly but fatally wounded. David is unique among the works investigated, as it is as a response to my personal connection to the event of death, which is universally experienced yet an individual’s response is highly personal. The covering of the heart in the work with a shield attached to the skin is an image akin to common expressions of having a broken heart requiring protection. This is an articulation of the vulnerability of the heart organ. Yet there are also common expressions of being thick skinned and having a thick hide, which convey a sense of the strength of the largest organ of the human body, the skin.

¹⁵ The inclusion of aspects of making in the installation included the sounds of making which created an added sensory experience for the audience as the processes of the maker are revealed to the audience. This inclusion of aspects of the making process is homage to my brother and father; both called David, who shaped my own making knowledge and experiences.
Through wounding the work created another voice, a different language for the body to convey a sentiment beyond pain, shock and grief that is beyond words. A frequent symbol of grief, a new opening, the wound, is created through the work and it produces a new kind of vocalization of my body. Similarly the presence of my blood elicits gasps from the audience. The wound expresses and helps to release the pain of silent damage. The sculpted objects also function as weapons and metaphors in David. The transparent glass arrows convey the randomness of death, the sudden and unanticipated arrival of a life-shattering event. This personal event is made public through the performance. Through sharing the performance, the emotional pain of the singularity of David’s death becomes shared, perhaps somewhat dissipated as others acknowledge and share death in the universal sense. We are all mortal.
Mark Making Tools

*Mark Making Tools* are essentially a set of instruments for writing into the skin\(^\text{16}\). The work is an assemblage installation composed of sculptural custom made instruments and digital recordings of the making and performing process. The objects are stainless steel scalpel holders designed to fit comfortably in the hand with guards to govern the depth of the incision during the scarification procedure. The objects are performative and interactive, hand-made, hybrid objects that combine, medical, artistic and cultural references into tools for inscription. This brings medicine into dialogue with art, augmenting medicine with the tools of art. Appropriated from industry and medicine, *Mark Making Tools* are tools of inscription de-contextualized by being placed into the hands of an artist. Exploring the work opens a discussion on making interactive objects, performance and the body.

The performance of the objects entails cutting the symbol of a ‘Fleur de Lis’ on myself. Historically, in France Canon law was employed to inscribe the same symbol of the ‘Fleur de Lis’ with a brand on the bodies of citizens for minor offences.\(^\text{17}\) The objects and footage are presented together in a three-tiered glass installation that references Franz Kafka’s description of the three-tiered harrow within the short story called *In the penal colony*. The harrow inscribed the crime on the offender\(^\text{18}\). The digital recording shows how

\(^{17}\) George Riley Scott. *The history of torture*. (Senate,1995), 164.

\(^{18}\) Franz Kafka, 193.
I made the objects in the workshop and used them to cut my own skin in a performance. The installation of this work incorporates the documentation by layering representations of making the tools and their use for cutting skin. The audience is invited to connect and explore the relationship between the making as part of the performance and the skin cutting events. The work was conceived and developed from an earlier work ‘Palimpsest’ that depicts literal inscription upon the body using customized objects worn on the tip of the finger for writing.

Figure 8 Palimpsest 2008

Implant grade stainless steel used in the work Mark Making Tools creates new applications for the biocompatible material outside the location of medicine. The objects made from this surgical grade stainless steel are, used on skin to open it up in a way that is surgically non-conventional. The work acts to shift the material of surgical steel and skin from the territory of medicine and industry to a body modification practice within performance art. The material functions differently from the manufacturers’ intention operating as a component in an assemblage as a performing object. The performing object opens the body to create new surfaces and potential applications.

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19 The making and cutting performances were enacted and documentation made with no audience present. I performed and filmed the work by setting up a tripod and viewing a rotatable live screen on a digital recorder.

20 Appendix A: Palimpsest

21 Sean Christian. “The term "surgical stainless steel" is not a technical term. It is a term that was originally coined by knife and cookware manufactures. It brought more marketable value to the material that they used. "Surgical stainless steel" is a generic term for a variety of different grades of steel and is not commonly found in any medical or metallurgical reports. There are no standards set for this type of metal. Implant Grade Stainless Steel: "Implant grade stainless steel" is a more accurate term for the steel used in body jewelry. There are standards set for what materials can be called implant grade. There are currently only two different types of stainless steel that commonly match these standards: 316L and 316LVM. These materials have been employed successfully in human implants that are in contact with soft tissue and bone for more than a decade”. Report on Stainless Steel presented at the Association of Professional Piercers. Open Meeting. May, (1998) Edited by Anne Greenblatt (2011). http://stason.org/TULARC/art/body-art/piercing/2A-1a-Report-on-Stainless-Steel.html (accessed March 22, 2012).
The installation of *Mark Making Tools* includes a large projection onto the wall adjacent to the assemblage housing the sculptural tools and a small LCD screen playing the same projection. Audiences are physically immersed in the projection as they look into the assemblage of tools and the images of cutting and making. *Mark Making Tools* re-contextualizes those tools where they are modified to perform with performer’s body, serving to re-inscribe new meaning on the tool and the performer. The work focuses on the relocation and application of materials that gives the objects that are made new additional meanings by placing them in a new context of performance.

*Lines of Flight*

“One will bolster oneself directly on a line of flight enabling one to blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections.”

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*Lines of Flight*\(^23\) is a performance that uses custom built sculptural arm and leg augmentation objects to extend and suspend my body as the performer by means of a flesh hook suspension. The audience is invited to participate by adding counterweights to activate the suspension apparatus, lifting my body off the ground. The work is based on the set of interacting elements comprised of stainless steel limb extensions that increase the physical reach and the subsequent potential of our bodies. This is achieved by physically being lifted onto the points of the limb extensions by two flesh hooks. The work explores notions of balance and a first-hand experience of literal forces that are pitted against and or with each other. The hooks were connected to small karabiners and stainless steel cables traveling through a pulley system, which took my weight and allowed me to stand on my limb extensions. The extensions ended in points so that I was unable to stand in them easily. Audience members added weight to the pulley system, lifting me up and taking my weight off the extensions and onto my flesh, allowing me to support myself on the tips of the limb extensions. Moving, swaying and swinging from the hooks I was lifted from the ground beyond the points of my extensions by the process of counterweights as the audience added more and more weight. The audience handled the counter weight objects and felt their weight as they were attached to the apparatus. The work required the interaction of the audience to make the performance happen. The audience became part of the event and the documentation of the event that in turn enabled future installations.

\(^{23}\) *Lines of Flight* - the title is expanded on in chapter three.
Lines of Flight was conceived through the work *Intimacy Through Proximity* where I was connected to another performer, Gretchen Riordan, via hooks in our backs attached to cables. We moved away from each other towards and facing projections of each other. This skin on our backs pulled and stretched under the force of the pull. This gave me the idea to explore the impact of forces upon bodies in subsequent suspension works.

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24 See appendix A for description of *Intimacy Through Proximity* performance.
Lines of Flight illustrates the combining of forces activating gravity used as a resistance that locates a fulcrum or pivoting point where balance resides. A skin-scape is created on my back and observed by the audience when force is applied to my skin during the suspension performance. Each audience participant came up close to my suspending body to apply another weight cradling the bag, their faces displaying their depth of feeling about the situation. In this way the work challenges the conventional distinction between audience and performer. Lines of Flight is not only a vehicle for exploring forces that act on a body but serves as an interactive performance tool making explicit the impact of affective forces on the audience.
Chapter One

*Be the force, performance and materials*

This chapter explores the concept of making and the experience and role of materials in performance art works in order to open up a discussion of the relationship between making and performance. The works discussed explore the significance of the materials utilized in performance events and examine how incorporating footage of the various processes of making the objects used in the performance informs the audience’s experience of the work.

The exploration and the understanding of materiality through physical experience underpins this research and provides the basis for a relationship between the body, making and performance. Kira O’Reilly’s work *Wet Cup that was first performed in 2000* also uses the body as material. O’Reilly discusses,

“[t]hroughout the process of this piece, there has been repeated opening of the skin. The differentiation between ‘making’ and ‘performing’ has become confused and redundant as my body has persisted in its own methodology… the scars seen… testify to this, tracing the history that can be followed on the surface of my body” 25

O’Reilly highlights the arbitrary distinction between making and performing as her body is left with traces of scars on her body from repeated performances.

Similarly, in *Mark Making Tools*, distinctions between materials like skin and steel and the processes such as making and performance are thrown into question, as footage of the making and performance process is included within the installation.

In the performance works discussed here the tools used range from traditional medical instruments to custom made devices that are designed to do very specific things. In my own practice a range of traditional metal-smithing techniques are applied to modern materials to make sculptural tools for non-traditional applications. The processes and transformations that were integral to the making were documented for use in a performance or installation. This has allowed aspects, of the making process, for example the use of metal and hammers, to create physical transformations in the materials and the

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possibilities for emotional and psychological transformations in the audience.

My experience as a body piercer bred a familiarity with the unique properties of skin and a desire to use it as a material. When the body is cut blood is produced as a new material. The chapter discusses the power that the image of blood has on the audience due to the complex significance of blood. It explores the significance of skin throughout different cultures and within the history of Western medicine and law.

The use of skin and blood as materials in my practice may appear to treat my body as an object. However, my body remains the subject insofar as it thinks and feels. By contrast to Cartesian dualism, which associates subjectivity with the mind and treats the body as an object that the mind controls, all of the works examined here present the body as both subject and object simultaneously. Cartesian dualism separates the mind from the body. However, there exists an alternative lineage of philosophers, including Nietzsche and later, feminist theorists of embodiment, who acknowledge that knowledge is physically felt. Feminist scholarship has addressed extensively the numerous practical problems that Cartesian dualism creates, one of which is the exclusion of bodily experience from the category of ‘knowledge’. If the mind is presumed to be abstract and immaterial then knowledge generated through bodily experience, such as through my work, is excluded prima facie from counting as valid research. Yet bodily experience is a rich, if frequently strange, source of understanding the world and our place in it. The works challenge Cartesian dualism by foregrounding a thinking body connected with a feeling mind.

Performance artist Gina Pane cut her own skin in her performances in the 1960’s. In her theoretical reflections of Lettre à un(e) inconnu(e), translated means letter to a (an) unknown (e), Pane wrote, “[i]f I open my body so that you can see your blood in it, it is for the love of you. (…) This is why I am so keen on YOUR presence during my actions”. Pane cuts her body with love for the audience so they can see blood that they in-turn possess within their own bodies. Her work was provocative because it transgressed the taboo of breaching the skin. In Le Lait Chaud 1972, Pane cuts the skin of her face, already a heavily inscribed surface in Western society especially since Pane is a woman.

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28 Gina Pane, “Lettre à un(e) inconnu(e)”. In Publication of the writings of Gina Pane: Writings of artists, edited by B. Chavanne, A. Marchand and J. Hountou, (ENSBA 2004), 246.
“Paris 1972, Le Lait Chaud. Dressed in a white shirt, Pane sits with her back to the audience. She slices her back with a razor blade. The blood sinks into the fabric. The red stains stand out against the white, like a drawing. Aestheticism. At another point of the performance, Pane faces the audience and lays the razor against her cheek. Blood comes to the surface. The participants, always silent during Pane’s performances, as if hypnotized, are suddenly aroused from their paralysis and scream, "No, not the face!" There follows an explosion of emotions and sense."²⁹

Pane claimed to create a new language through the “wound”.³⁰ Indeed, the audience’s strong reaction against Pane’s self-cutting illustrate that the skin is strongly inscribed with significance in many cultures. During Le Lait Chaud, audience members intervened as she transgressed their boundary of acceptance.³¹

![Figure 14 Gina Pane Le Lait Chaud 1972](image)

The work David utilizes and explores the physical boundaries of skin as a metaphor for social boundaries placed upon the use of skin. David is a creation of sculptural objects that enable the body to find a new voice for grief through performance. The objects become socially inscribed symbols, repositioned and relocated by being worn through the skin and used to express grief.

**Encountering materials**


Materials are important in my practice as the works are grounded in an understanding of the specific nature of materials and their relationship to bodies. *David* uses stainless steel, glass, audio-visual technology and the body, especially the skin and blood. Skin and blood are essentially different from inanimate materials like steel and glass because they are lived. The body is more than a source of materials for art. It is the site of the Self; I am my body. My subjectivity is my material, as much as steel, glass and audio-visual technology.

Materials are selected for their significance and physical properties. Stainless steel is used for its non-corrosiveness, biocompatibility\textsuperscript{32} and retention of surface finish. Skin is selected for its availability, ability to repair itself and complex social and personal significance. The preexisting, deep significance of these materials lend interesting meanings to the work. For example implant grade stainless steel is co-opted from the medical industry, made into modified scalpels – tools of the surgical trade – and used on the body in non-conventional ways by an artist rather than a medical practitioner.

*David* uses glass to make arrows, which in itself disrupts assumptions about what material should be used for what purpose. Glass arrows are unexpected because they shatter on impact. Skin and steel juxtaposed intensifies the differences in quality of each material.

\textsuperscript{32} Biocompatible is the ability of a substance to be compatible and not cause damage when in close proximity to the body, namely the skin.
The use of a body bleeding as a material in performance is intended to make the audience aware of one possible way that their own body may be used. Performances and the objects I create for it are intended to expose sensorial limits in the audiences’ bodies, where they are able to locate their threshold – the point where they must look away, or the point where they choose not to look away, “[t]he close-up impact of a bleeding body in the same room as us, while difficult to look at, is much harder to ignore and look away from.”

The lingering physiological affects producing sensation moving through their body. That clench in their stomach, that heat of flushness as blood pumps through their faces; the images that linger in their minds as they reflect on what they saw and felt in the days and years to come. The threshold is where both performer and audience are touched, affected and transformed in ways that are unique to the lives our bodies have lived. Of course these are my own experiences of what goes on during the performance, projected onto the audience. I do not know for sure what happens for them. All I have to go by is the visual and verbal feedback they provide and my own intuition, my own sensitivity extended towards others.

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Theorists like Mary Richards discuss the impact on audiences of a bleeding body\textsuperscript{34} with its abject quality. “The close-up impact of a bleeding body in the same room as us, while difficult to look at, is much harder to ignore and look away from.”\textsuperscript{35} Joshua Sofaer also writes about the potential impact of the abject body-to-body encounter for audiences created in blood producing performances. Sofaer acknowledges the importance of the work of artists such as Franco B and Kira O’Rielly, who utilize the body as its canvas and explore boundaries of the body, confronting societies’ taboos and phobias.\textsuperscript{36} The work of these theorists and artists who utilize blood suggest that sympathy, empathy, revulsion, even apathy can arise in audiences as they encounter bleeding bodies in performance.

The abject quality of blood and its production through opening the body creates an inner struggle or disruption in the audience where bodily limits are located. The appearance of blood means the audience is aware this object is also a person who bleeds and feels pain. The materiality of blood is re-experienced outside the body in the works by touch, sight and in live performance by smell.

**Skin**

Skin is embedded with significance as a material and site for exploration of socio-legal implications through history. Human skin was historically used to cover books as parchment termed vellum with the technique of anthropodermic bibliopegy,\textsuperscript{37} practiced mainly from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Skin could be bequeathed for the purpose.\textsuperscript{38} Other skins came from executed criminals and in some cases; their trial proceedings were bound in their own flesh.\textsuperscript{39} The works utilize the ability of skin to be re-inscribed with meaning by pulling apart layers of inscription. Through treating bodies as


\textsuperscript{38} R.W., Hackwood. "Human Skin Tanned," *Notes and Queries*, 3rd series, X (Oct 27, 1866), 341.

\textsuperscript{39} Charles Cox, "Tanning the Skin of Criminals," *Notes and Queries*, 4th series, XI (Feb. 15, 1873), 139.
objects and exploring the materiality of skin, this opens the discussion on what constitutes a body. I will return to this discussion in the following sections.

**Significance of Blood**

The production of blood in performance is charged with significance. This often creates physiological and psychological responses in audiences. The act of cutting or piercing in performance is also loaded with signification. It is often pathologized within a medical framework and generalized understanding of what is implied by intentional cutting to the body.

Layers of cultural significance from historical references load blood as a meaningful material and metaphor. In a historical medical realm the practice of blood letting to cure many ailments was common and bloodletting retains semantic connection to grief and catharsis. The instruments used for such a practice possessed their own symbolic function which have until very recently been controlled by the medical institution. The social and medical significance of cutting and piercing are relocated in the works with their prior meaning dismantled and reformed in an artwork with new connections. Richards states these new connections can be created by using cutting in performance, in terms of opening up channels of communication with a ‘jaded public’. Richard claims that the creation of an intentional wound by the performer creates intimacy with the audience,

“[b]leeding bodies create intimacy and immediacy through the psychic shocks offered by the presence of flowing blood”  

In other words the presence of a bleeding body like our own creates a psychological connection between the artist and the audience.

Richards claims that when a bleeding body is viewed in performance religious reference can also be present, whether intended or not by the artist.  

Richards further states that the iconic religious reference of the bleeding body signals the exposure of the depth of religions inscription that runs through western society.

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“Bleeding bodies speak volumes; the image of Christ’s bleeding body is engrained into western cultural psyche…”

While performance artist Ron Athey does resonate the religious suffering observed in his work, Franko B’s work resonates not religious but physical suffering. Athey appropriates religious iconography visually and metaphysically and relocates it through performance art producing blood in response to what he calls “malignant tyranny of deception and abuse.” Franko B re-performs *Bleeding out*, where he bleeds out from tapped veins over time to eventually collapse from loss of blood inviting questions about mortality and empathy. “My work is not about death; my body is not passive, not a dead body, and, in a way, its giving life by bleeding”.

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Performance artist Kira O’Reilly’s *Succour - Wet Cup*, performed in 2002 and 2003, entails an attendant who scores O’Reilly legs with a scalpel blade then attaches glass cups used in traditional practices of therapeutic blood letting and Chinese medicine. The cups draw by suction filling the bulbs with blood. O’Reilly’s statement about the work *Wet cup*, describes her use of a wound as a mark and a notion of ‘spoiling’ a body by opening it up, creating a different body from other bodies and exposes a state of being other. This notion of ‘spoiling’ a body by marking it with cuts is linked to assumptions and social expectations about the role of the female body in society, including her blood and skin. 45

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Blood as a material in this art context requires specialized handling practices to eliminate excessive wound creation and the potential for cross contamination with foreign bodies. Working with blood as a creative expression requires control, precision in dexterity and trust. In an art context it can be effectively stripped of its associations and read as beautiful and decorative, allowing attributes such as the colour to be appreciated on purely aesthetically grounds.

Bodies as objects and a subject

Stelarc is an Australian performance artist who used the practice of flesh hook suspension in a series of works during the 1980’s. Stelarc put the suspended body in the public eye, relocating the process of suspension to performance and installation art. Stelarc talks of removing the subjectivity of the body in suspension where the body is only an object and the subjective experience is unimportant.

"What is important is the body as an object, not a subject - not being a particular someone but rather becoming something else”.46

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Stelarc implies that subjectivity may be separated from the body by disavowing his own consciousness of sensations such as pain. This is reflected in his constant discussion of “the obsolete body”. My work differs from Stelarc's because my suspensions are about the sensations of the act. My practice is focused on the experience of becoming a subject and object simultaneously. My suspended and objectified body experiences pain. Pain insists; it must be processed somehow. Even to control pain as Stelarc does requires effort. I do not pretend that pain is not part of my practice, instead I embrace pain for what it can teach me about my body and for what it can teach the audience about their own bodily existence.

Making provides a platform for an encounter between the artist, the audience, and materials such as steel and skin. Within this encounter the artist and her audience may explore connections between the materials and their capabilities. The use of the body as a material, medium, and location for art makes the body a versatile component to my practice. The presence of blood in the works investigated has cultural, medical and social significance. The blood carries this signification but when it is placed it in a context of creative production the material takes on a meaning or productive capacity. The colour of blood is effectively de-familiarized and disassociated from a medical or first aid context to that of an art context, which is one of its new productions. My work strives to highlight the feeling body in the audience that is often buried by Western society’s obsession with acting from your head not your heart. Essentially I believe if the feelings or nerve endings that lay under the surface like capillaries of blood are awakened and brought to the surface and revealed by the experience of the work, literally opening up the body, producing sensation creates a feeling mind and a thinking body through corporeal transformation.

The foregrounding of the thinking body connected with a feeling mind in the works challenge Cartesian dualism. If Cartesian dualism is an inadequate model to understand the work then a different model is necessary. Michel Foucault describes embodied subjectivity as the “inscribed surface of events”. Skin is not simply a container for the viscera; it is a palimpsest, written upon over and over again with social significance. This

has direct implications for understanding *Mark Making Tools* and other works that involve cutting, piercing or otherwise inscribing the skin.
Chapter Two

*See the forces Living art, inscription and documentation*

The chapter examines documentation and its role within the works. It explores the types of documentation that exist beyond the audiovisual record of an event. The object shows the physical transformations embedded within its surface and is therefore a document of the making processes.

This activity of cutting tissue and the production of a scar is repositioned within the sphere of art. In the work *Mark Making Tools*, skin cutting and the production of scar tissue inscribes the skin beyond its usual socially accepted significance, for example the positioning of a blemish as undesirable. The cutting of tissue itself in the work occurs in private; the scar and the audiovisual documentation of that process are the only evidence accessible to the audience. When the audience is not present for the live performance and when the artist is physically absent for the installation, the work can rely on a mediated representation of the artist’s body to carry a sense of liveness within the work.

Theorists like Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander have debated the concept of liveness in performance and this chapter examines and contributes to the debate via a discussion of what constitutes ‘live art’, ‘living art’ and ‘live performance’ in the context of installation. Auslander and Joseph Sofaer claim that live art is a social strategy for change.
Live performance and living art

‘Live Art’ was first termed in the middle of the 1980’s in the United Kingdom by arts professionals who were trying to describe art practices where artists were making works that were beyond the classifications at the time. While the genre Performance Art had been established in the United States since the 1970’s, the use of the term ‘live art’ was an effort to recognize the range of live based arts giving those practices legitimacy within contemporary culture.

The common definition of Live Art is when an artist makes work in the presence of an audience in time and space. Performance art theorist Peggy Phelan states that live art should not be documented or documentable. Phelan represents a group of performance art writers, who are adamant that live performance is about the presence of performer and audience; it’s about being there,

"[p]erformance cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."\(^2\)

By contrast, Philip Auslander and the Live Art Development Agency\(^3\) explore what constitutes ‘live art’ when mediated through technology with an absent artist. Auslander refers to performance using audio-visual or multimedia with an absent artist as mediatized performance. He challenges the binary opposition\(^4\) structure of mediatized performance pitted against live performance. Auslander is,

"in favor of a view that emphasizes the mutual dependence of live and the mediatized and challenges the traditional assumptions that live precedes the mediatized."\(^5\)

The live performance where a bleeding body is replaced by a mediatized

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representation of the live action is still ‘live art’ because the work actively produces ongoing transformative potential within the audience, the performer and the objects. Mark Making Tools questions the margins of what performance and live means in terms of a mediated representation of the performance. When the artist is present and especially bleeding, the liveness is certainly a multisensory experience. Even when the artist is not physically present, as in Mark Making Tools, the installation environment and its documentation can still create a palpable sense of liveness, causing the audience to question what liveness is and where it may be located. Auslander claims ‘live art’ is “a moving target”⁶ and “a radical social strategy for change.”⁷ Live art as a moving target means that it eludes definition and this slipperiness is radical.

To apply liveness as a conceptual framing device to interdisciplinary work also interrogates what is theoretically meant by ‘live’. All the works investigated question what ‘liveness’ is and where ‘liveness’ resides. It frequently includes experimental processes and experiential practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks⁸. This slipperiness is what makes it a radical and potentially transformative social strategy. Performance theorist Joshua Sofaer talks of live art coming into being through a disruptive encounter between the work and the audience. Between the work and the audience is a slippage; a gap is opened within which each audience member may be affected, inspired, moved, changed. This concept of slippage and how audiences can be repositioned from contact with ‘live art’ is central to all the works examined in this research.

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Performative

The body of the artist (whether present in the flesh or digitally mediated) is not performing in the theatrical sense, where an actor in character adheres to a script. Live art is not performance so much as it is performative. This is an important distinction between live art and a rehearsed performance. Judith Butler defines performativity as “…that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains”. In other words the power of pre-existing ideas about what marks, such as scars, or actions, such as skin cutting, signify, have the power to create material reality in ways that fit the requirements of a particular society. This material reality includes but is not limited to the feelings, emotions, thoughts, perceptions and the documents and objects that live art creates. An encounter between an object (including a document: photograph etc) and a human body (audience member, gallery patron) is a performative event, in Judith Butler’s sense of performativity.

Performance enables objects to develop their own performativity through being involved in an action wherein they become objects that perform. *Mark Making Tools* does this by using a body as material for inscription with a performing object. The objects become performative as they create physical changes and new embodiments in the performer and audiences. *Mark Making Tools* is a live work that allows psychological and physiological forces to manifest. For example the body is exposed to inscriptions from the outside, as in piercing and cutting. Pierced and/or cut skin signifies a myriad of things in contemporary Western culture from confident individuality, intimate self-experimentation to dissociation, mental illness and so-called self-harm. These significations have material effects – they impact or inscribe the lives of those who bear the marks. Inscription will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

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Documentation

In these works documentation exists in both the physical artifacts produced and the digital recording of all the process. Making is a form of documentation recording a process of actions and ending in an object such as a set of tools for inscribing the skin. Through the performance the objects can transform bodies, creating artifacts and layers of embodiment. The artist’s scarified body becomes a document of the work, both as an object and as evidence of the process. Similarly, the video recording of the making and performance processes is a digital document that, through editing, operates as a temporal compliment to the physical things created.

Performance artist Marina Abramovic states that live art action event requires reflection to enable those actions to take on a new life of their own beyond the performer. The actions continue to perform without the performer via documentation. Jessica Santone discusses Marina Abramovic’s work in terms of manipulation of repetition and temporality,

“time-based media arts are frequently preserved through some means of documentation that in turn is often described as performative – that is, something that must be replayed, reread or reinterpreted in order to be experienced”.

Figure 20 Marina Abramovic

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*Mark Making Tools* highlights the spatial and temporal issues of documentation by bringing the events of making and performance together in the installation. *Mark Making Tools* depicts the process of scarification where I inscribe a ‘Fleur de Lis’ on my stomach. The footage in *Mark Making Tools* shows the cutting of skin digitally layered over the making process where images and sounds of hammer strikes as the tools are formed on an anvil are heard and seen. The images of fire used to heat the metal for shaping, layered over images of the blood being staunched from the fleshy cutting of the ‘Fleur de Lis’ inscribed in the skin. Historically, Canon law\(^\text{12}\) in France, the inscribed the same symbol on offenders with a brand by agents of the law.\(^\text{13}\)

![Image of bloodied skin](image.png)

**Figure 21 Mark Making Tools’ Fleur de Lis 2011**

The bloody images from *Mark Making Tools* leave a lasting impression on the audience. Digital representations of objects cutting skin deep enough to draw blood produces a vivid picture in the audience’s mind’s eye. The gut clenches, the palms and upper lip sweat in response to the knowledge of how the tools in front of them can be used.

The documentation of the making process was overlaid with footage of the performance event creating the final documentation for inclusion in the installation and subsequent performances. The combining of making and performance events leaves traces of the objects origin in the documentation


\(^\text{13}\) George Riley Scott. *The history of torture.* (Senate,1995), 164.
where both events are seen simultaneously. Through the documentation the audience experiences the objects application in relation to the body. The elasticity of the making and performing events in time and space allows the work to evolve and not be confined to who had or didn’t have the opportunity to attend an initial live performance.

The forces of Inscription

"[t]he constitution of the body rests in its inscription; the body becomes the text which is written upon and from which it is indistinguishable."  

Pippa Brush’s premise that the body is both object and subject of inscription rests on Michel Foucault’s description of the body as the “inscribed surface of events.” The body is exposed to inscriptions from the outside, as in piercing and cutting. Once cut, the body inscribes itself through scarification, where bodily boundaries, the skin, become both object and subject of inscription. Michel De Certeau discusses how the law inscribes bodies to become social bodies, referring to the skin of ‘its’ subjects as parchments. As object of inscription the skin bears the mark of social expectations to be healthy, pristine and proper, for example the complex politics surrounding who is permitted to cut the body open and in what circumstances. Why is it socially acceptable in most Western societies to cut open a healthy body to implant synthetic shape changing objects but not to inscribe marks on a healthy face also for adornment? Medicine and social concepts of gender and beauty dictate when it is appropriate to open a body, removing autonomy from the individual and transferring them to the medical establishment – for a profit. The surgeon’s scalpel is Kafka’s harrow, a punitive machine that inscribes social law of bodily beauty on the body of its subjects.

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The act of modifying the body produces a new bodily inscription in relation to others in the world. Contemporary social prohibitions against cutting the skin for non-medical reasons illustrate how laws of wholeness, cleanliness, health are inscribed upon the body – inscriptions only made visible ironically through transgressing the law by cutting the skin. The work reveals the hidden process of social inscription by presenting symbols of the socially acceptable medical arena in an action that is contrary to its original design. Through scarification, medicines own tools are used to expose and transgress its assumptions about the 'proper' boundaries of knowledge, technology, skin and self.

The scar

Nina G. Jablonski observes,

"[p]eople in all known cultures modify their skin in some way, often using deliberate marking and manipulation to convey highly personal information about themselves to each other."17

Throughout history, many cultures18 have used corporeal inscription by intentional scarification of the skin for adornment, to mark belonging and rites of passage. Scars document the processes of mark making and inscription. So, to understand the forces of inscription is to arm oneself with the knowledge that we are constructed and can reconstruct ourselves to some extent. The art works give a glimpse of the reconstructions and differences that are possible by lying bare the forces and inscriptive patterns that exist.

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18 Robert Bains. The Decorated Body. “Both Nuba men and women are among many cultures that scarify the skin to indicate physiological development and social status. For Nuba women the scarification event is linked to her reproductive abilities.”, “The scarification operation is performed with two instruments: a hooked thorn to lift the skin and pull it up, and a small blade with which the raised skin is sliced to produce a protruding scar. The more the skin is pulled up before cutting, the higher the resulting keloid. A high keloid lasts longer and is considered to be more attractive”. 1979, 70.
The skin is already inscribed with signifiers of gender, age, ethnicity and health; marks of modern subjectivity. The cutting performances add yet more marks to the skin, rendering it a palimpsest. A palimpsest is something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form. The cuts heal to become scars, subtly changing shape, texture, colour, sensitivity and significance. The scars add to the palimpsest and document the inscriptive process, highlighting the inscriptive process through their relative visibility. However, scars are not a mere representation of what has passed. Scars signify in complex ways in Western society and as such they actively inscribe the subjectivity of their wearer. Everyday people read scars, especially scars that look self-inflicted, and make connections about who we are based on what the scars say to them.

Robert Bain provides an historical insight into the different attitudes from Western society towards intentionally scarring the skin. Bain shifts from describing scarification techniques in detail to calling it “mutilation” in a western context. He also describes cultures other than Western as “exotic” meaning different or outside. This is very much the anthropologist’s tactic, to define the non-Western other as mutilated and exotic in order to constitute non-scarified, Western bodies as normal by comparison. Western society also pathologises intentional cutting, whether done privately on oneself or publically as a performance. Conversely and hypocritically, the intentional cut performed in a medical context for normative enhancement, as in aesthetic surgery, is excused. This polarity in general attitudes is based on beliefs about who has

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the right to mark whose skin. The skin is a site of social struggle subject to the forces of multiple competing modes of inscription.

Physical transformations in my body can take the shape of connective tissue awareness as well as scars. Sometimes even talking about hooks in my back takes by memory cells down the sensory pathway and a spark or twinge of nerve cells leaps into life at the old hook entry and exit locations.

Performance artist Kira O'Reilly uses the skin as a material for inscription. O'Reilly cuts herself in order to identify many modes of inscription. She also relocates medical tools, taking them away from surgeons and using them to inscribe her own body in various ways. In the work, Sssshh... Succour. The skin being cut — (neither here nor there) 2008, O'Reilly sits, naked, cutting her body repeatedly, inscribing perfectly parallel lines mapped out in surgical tape with a latitude and longitude grid. O'Reilly states that the skin is “(re)marked” like a palimpsest. O'Reilly’s cut, bleeding skin, figured as a palimpsest, exposes the many forces that impact it, shape it and make it signify in conflicting ways. O'Reilly’s skin is feminine, erotic and somewhat chaotic because it is bleeding. Yet the damage is measured and controlled as in a surgical procedure.

Figure 23 Kira O'Reiley Sssshh...Succour The skin being cut — (neither here nor there) 2008


21 Keith Gallasch. “This action begins where words fail me...Using processes of measuring and cutting, the skin is (re)marked, like a text or a drawing, etching a history that can be followed on the surface of the skin, like a palimpsest.” National Review of Live Art: blood lines. RealTime issue #52. Dec-Jan 2002 pg. 31 [www.realtimearts.net/article/52/9278](http://www.realtimearts.net/article/52/9278) (accessed Aug 2011).
The margins of what performance and live means, is questioned in *Mark Making Tools* in terms of a mediated representation of the performance. Mediatized representation of a live performance actively produces ongoing transformative potential within the audience, the performer and the objects. The fleshing out of an action continues after the initial performance action, becoming, and developing its own meaning. Documentation becoming the flesh of the performance event that lives after the live action has passed – the documentation is alive. The performance event affectively lives on re-inscribing, becoming a palimpsest of performances, each performance with a slight difference. The repetition with slight difference each time creates potential for new emergent futures through these variations.

*Mark Making Tools* reveals the processes by which bodies are inscribed with social significance, producing bodies as subjects whose agency emerges through the process that Judith Butler names performativity. These inscriptive processes usually remain hidden from view. *Mark Making Tools* renders inscription perceptible as cut, bleeding skin; it also produces new modes of inscription via its audiovisual content. The work also foregrounds myself – the artist as the agent of inscription rather than simply its product insofar as I cut myself in ways that I choose using objects that I have made.
Chapter Three

Feel the forces – Interaction and suspension

Suspension performance illustrates graphically and viscerally how different types of forces, physical and affective, interact – transforming bodies by modifying their capacities. *Lines of Flight* is intended to create connections between the observable effect of the forces of suspension and their felt affect upon the audience. The exploration of the relationship between social and physical forces exposes forces and establishes space for new understandings of the interrelationship of forces that act on the body.

While Stelarc’s suspensions were mostly static, *Lines of Flight* was dynamic. Stelarc denies that pain is a significant force at play in his suspensions.²² However pain is fore grounded in my suspension as a force that has an important effect on the capacities on the range of motion of a suspended body.

When the audience watches the forces applied to a suspended person, my desire is to create an encounter that generates an exchange of capacities between bodies. A receptive audience feels the visceral reaction to the encounter within their own body creating empathy between audience and performer as a compositional empathy.

Suspension

“There are two major Hindu festivals that focus on piercing [including suspension] rituals: Thaipusam and Chidi Mari… [both of which] have been effectively outlawed as public festivals in India and Sri Lanka, but in other parts of Southeast Asia, like Malaysia and Thailand, these festivals flourish today.”²³

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The practice of flesh hook suspension of the human body has been observed in many cultures in different locations over time, such as India, the Middle East, and North America, usually in the context of devotional ceremonies as a measure of endurance and dedication. These include suspensions performed by Sadu Indians’ in the Hindu devotion ceremony, the American Indian suspensions from the chest called O-Kee-Pa and the back called Ka-Kee-Pa and various Sioux tribes performing the Sun Dance suspension ceremony. The earliest evidence of suspension seen in India can be traced back five thousand years and was about creating connections. Suspension festivals are still undertaken in parts of India and Thailand.

Figure 25 Sadus and Savite Hindu devotees and Chidi Mari festival during the 1920s

Figure 26 Thaipusam festival India 2011

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25 Brynna Ashley. “Hooked on suspension: It is more than blood and gore; it is the ultimate piercing”, “American Indians pierced eagle claws and wooden pegs into the flesh of their chests (O-Kee-Pa) and backs (Ka-Kee-Pa) and hung from tree branches. In some rituals they also dangled buffalo skulls from hooks pierced into their skin.” 2009. [http://xpress.sfsu.edu/archives/magazine/014245.html](http://xpress.sfsu.edu/archives/magazine/014245.html) (accessed May 14, 2012)

26 Brynna Ashley. “Hooked on suspension: It is more than blood and gore; it is the ultimate piercing”. 2009 [http://xpress.sfsu.edu/archives/magazine/014245.html](http://xpress.sfsu.edu/archives/magazine/014245.html)(accessed May 14, 2012)

Contemporary San Francisco based suspension practitioner, Fakir Mustafa teaches suspension as a spiritual practice in his regular 'spirit and flesh' workshops. He performed the Native American Sundance ceremony assisted by Jim Ward who was the founder of the Gauntlet considered by many to be the father of the piercing movement.  

Flesh hook suspension has been depicted in mainstream films such as *A man called horse* (1970) and *The Cell* (2000). *The Cell* illustrates Western societies widely acknowledged obsession with denigrating and pathologising specific desires portrayed as self-destructive and masochistic.

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My research into this field draws from viewing documentation of performing these suspensions initially of non Western cultures seen through the pages of *National Geographic Magazine* and later to more recent politically driven events. Suspension was used sept 2008 effectively politizing the body in an environmental awareness campaign between Greenpeace and a cosmetics company Lush.\(^{29}\)

Stelarc’s *Event for stretching the skin # 4* performed in Munich in 1977, is an inverted hanging suspension position, which creates a type of landscape of the skin produced from the pull of the hooks from the weight of his body.

The practice of suspension sculpts the skin to become what seen as a landscape of the skin. This skinscape reveals the extraordinary strength and durability of skin as a material. Performance art situates itself to facilitate firsthand experiences of actual events and provides insights into the potential of the body to both transform physically and explore limits where creative bodily spaces are created. This space or location where the art encounter occurs with potential to create transformation in participants through repositioning and reshaping of the body. Opening the body in a performance event creates a space and relocates the body by opening the self to multiple social meanings for new futures to emerge. This could be the bodily capabilities learnt about the strength of skin, the ability to endure the sensations required for suspension and cutting or the ability to witness to such an event without fleeing, vomiting or being carted away in a straight jacket.

In my works and research undertaken during my candidature, flesh hook suspension is used to challenge representations of the body. My works are informed by the ethnographic lineage of modified bodies as well as the processes and apparatus involved in traditional flesh hook suspension as much
as it is by my fascination with the sub cultural world of piercing.

The use of flesh hook suspension in my performance work evolved from my experience as a professional body piercer. I use suspension to explore forces that act on bodies. The frequency of live suspension performances is limited by the time needed for the skin to heal enough before hooks can be inserted near the same location again.

Lines of Flight - The title

The name Lines of Flight is derived from the Deleuzian concept where new capabilities are created in bodies through the reorganization of their forces. In A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze and Guattari state, “[a]s in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification.”

Lines of articulation such as segmentarity, strata, territories are modes of organisation. Any organisation can always become disorganized to some degree, and it can also be organised differently. In fact any mode of organisation, due to its very selection as such, contains all those alternative modes of organisation that it could have been yet is not. It is only through the active exclusion of these non-actualized possibilities that actual modes of organisation may exist at all. These non-actualized (or virtual) possibilities exist as movements of deterritorialization and destratification. A line of flight is the point of contact between the actualized and the non-actualized – a connection of sorts but also a volatile threshold where one always threatens to tip over into the other. A line of flight is escape from organised modes of subjectivity and social stratification. In Tamsin Lorraine’s words, a line of flight is “a path of mutation precipitated through the actualization of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond”.

The work Lines of Flight employs flesh hook suspension as a mode of encounter between bodies to create lines of flight for everybody.

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Forces

“What defines a body is its relation between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body – whether it is chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship.” 32

Deleuze develops Nietzsche concept of forces where a body is composed of forces and bodies are force fields that act upon one another that exchange capacities through their encounters. “Nietzsche emphasizes the fact that force has another force as its object. But it is important to see that forces enter into relations with other forces.” 33 Where bodies as force fields being able to exchange capacities from one force field to another. The experience of seeing and feeling forces in action creates an understanding that we are made up of forces acting upon each other.34 This understanding creates a space to perceive the exchange that takes place between acting forces. My performance work brings these bodies composed of force fields together in an art encounter to exchange capabilities through performing with objects.

Simon O'Sullivan states that the task of art is to capture forces. Deleuze and Guattari say that this, ultimately, is what makes art abstract – the "summoning" and making visible of otherwise imperceptible forces.” 35 In other words art is a monument essentially capturing forces and preserving the creation of the artist where those forces are summoned in the artwork. My practice uses flesh hook suspension as a tool to reveal the many different physical and psychological forces that act on the body rendering them visible and perceptible.36 Force has many definitions that make it a versatile tool for experimenting on the body.


34 Oxford University Press. “Forces [is defined as] strength, energy as an attribute of physical action, movement, coercion, compulsion, a person or thing regarded as exerting power or influence, mental or moral strength or power, the state of being in effect, the powerful effect of something and an organized body of military personnel or police”. “Force [in the context of physics as an] influence tending to change the motion of a body or produce motion or stress in a stationary body.” Oxford Dictionaries Online (2012), http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/force (accessed Feb 26, 2012).

Australian performance artist Ken Unsworth produced work in the 1970’s that is significant, as the works were based on making the force of gravity directly observable. When I observed the acclaimed work *Suspended stone circle II* (1974 – 1977) I was affected by what I perceived as the sheer scale of effort required to make the stones look like they were floating effortlessly. I felt aware of the potential gravitational energy stored in the work as the force acted on the stones.

Unsworth also created a group of works around the same time where he used the force of gravity on the body through performance. The work included suspending his body not from hooks but in tied positions that required endurance. His work differed from many conceptual artists of the time because it incorporated aspects of the feeling body portraying human emotions such as tension in form and space where Unsworth, “reincorpor[ates] human emotions into the arrangement of form and space. In his early sculptures of suspended or propped rocks, Unsworth enhanced such concerns through the use and control of the forces of gravity”.  

*Figure 32* Ken Unsworth hanging rocks *Suspended stone circle II* (1974 – 1977)

*Figure 1* Ken Unsworth performances with his body

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Suspension offers a platform for exploring gravitational force on the body while highlighting the social forces that act on an audience when observing such an event. The observable changes from the physical forces of suspension are experienced against a backdrop of felt responses in the suspended body and the observers of the event. These responses are affected by social forces such as public feeling around the acceptance of piercing and suspension practices.

Western society often exerts social forces on bodies to become ideal citizens that are productive and aspire to a single norm contributing to the capitalist system. An example is the imperative by Western society to maintain a clean and proper body closed up and closed off from the bodies of others; not bleeding, not volitionally in pain, certainly not hanging from steel hooks pierced into one’s back. In this instance a clean and proper body may be put to work; a body hanging suspended from piercings cannot contribute its forces to the market as a worker or commodity; like Leigh Bowery’s masochist, the suspended body is perfectly useless.

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The encounter between the suspended body of the artist and her audience members is an event of interpretation. One of the things that happen in applying physical forces to a body during suspension is that it opens up the prospect of revealing the perceived line between physical and social forces as the audience works to make sense of, the event. Thresholds and bodily limits are revealed; opening the feeling body to never previously imagined potentials. This was evidenced when I was suspended in *Lines of Flight* I heard audible gasps as my body was lifted from the ground and I swung on the hooks. When I starting spinning around I observed an increase in movement, gasps and wide-eyed responses from the audience. I felt like a great number of the audience who were present for the suspension had witnessed a bodily potential altogether new and surprising based on the degree of display of body language. They looked like they were surprised that a body could in fact be suspended by two hooks with the skin with the extra 10kgs of weight from the objects without tearing. The spinning action created by my own intentional movement seemed to add to the observable surprise that I would willingly produce and increase what they were perhaps imagining, such a sensation in my body as a performer in the name of art.
Lines of Flight asks the audience to participate by adding weights to a pulley system that in turn tugs on the flesh hooks that enables the artist to stand on precarious points the audience to become complicit in the interaction. The intention of the work is to establish a situation where the audience can potentially become aware of and reflect upon the feelings and social forces that affect them as they watch the physical forces applied to the artist. The witnessing audience see themselves as having a similar body to the performer, experiencing empathetically their own bodies capacity for pain, injury, perhaps even mortality.

Complicit audience: empathy and identification

The gamete of roles or parts played within performance collaboration with other bodies produces interrelationships that are interestingly complex when the subject object dualism is challenged – interesting because the boundary or threshold between subject and object is exposed through examining these interrelationships. Relationships exist between the roles acted by the same body as well as roles between bodies. Those roles include maker, performer
and audience. Relationships also exist between objects and finally between bodies and objects.

![Figure 37 Lines of Flight 2009](image)

The audience’s assumptions about expected roles and relationships between and within bodies are disrupted, by combining roles within the same body through the performance and installation works. The works produce new kinds of bodies, transformed by challenging the roles of maker, performer and audience. The maker becomes performer or the audience becomes performer through audience participation in the performance event. Engaging the audience to participate in performance events produces new encounters.

For example, the work *Lines of Flight* requires the participation of the audience members. The audience is placed in a position where their active participation causes an effect on the performer. When the audience participates they add more weight and force to the hooks. This action allows the performer to balance on the limb extensions, helping and hindering in the same moment. Traditionally the audience may watch a performance or observe a work of art as subjects without acknowledging the role that their own subjectivity plays in constituting the objectified work. In *Lines of Flight* the audience is forced to adopt the role of complicit audience with their decision to participate in a collaborative performance event, producing an audience member who is also a performer. The audience is essentially agreeing to watch without intervening, they are
somehow condoning the suffering that is occurring before them. This perhaps forces the audience to confront their own voyeurism and sadism.

Cesare and Joy raise the possibility that such performances, where the subject/object dichotomy is disrupted, offers an opportunity to imagine an ethics of witnessing performance,

“This transposition of physical witness into performer in the durational experience offers a space within which to imagine a possible ethics of performance, or rather it reveals performance as a potential queer connectivity.” 39

This potential queer connectivity is observed in Lines of Flight in that the audience is troubled – they are thrown out of the comfortable, prescribed role of voyeur and called upon to intervene directly in the event. Regardless of the response, this troubling is enough to compose queer connectivity. A line of flight is drawn, a rupture created, the conventions and the relations of power they support questioned – ethics in action. Califia articulates this moment of queer

connectivity as the ability of live art to cut through the safe distance afforded by fake representations of bodies in pain,

"Our senses have been cluttered by fake blood on television, special effects explosions in movies, Internet chat-room romance. We are fortunate indeed to have artists who use their bodies to make their point. When you confront such a spectacle, you are no innocent bystander. You are culpable, a co-conspirator."  

The sight of hooks through flesh up close could potentially be quite overwhelming and may be all too real for some audiences. For an audience member to see someone being suspended by their flesh can potentially illicit different kinds of responses. This it is mitigated by the fact that the majority of the audience remains in the room to watch the performance and they do not leave or interject. The fact that no one attempted to stop the suspension may suggest that the performance created a complicit audience. This can be a reflection of our socialization as we are trained as an audience not to intervene in a performance art event. Even though the audience was witnessing a painful even it was not deemed as life threatening and warranted intervention.

Gina Pane’s *Le Lait Chaud* 1972 were she cut her face was an exception to this non-intervention. Her audience who were consistently silent during her performances was prompted to call out "No, not the face!", as the razor she held against her cheek drew blood. The threshold has been approached and their limit had been reached as the social forces of acceptable performance were challenged and intervention was deemed necessary even though her life was not at threat.

The suspension performances in my practice are designed to manipulate forces and physically transform the performer. The objects apply forces that act on the body to pull, stretch, compress, pierce and cut flesh. By the application and manipulation of these forces with specialized objects, thresholds and bodily

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limits are revealed to open the body to never previously imagined possibilities through corporeal transformation.

Types of corporeal transformation include different kinds of manifestations that can be a process and a result of the event. Transformation can be physical as in scars or postural changes through to the audience body having to remove itself from the presence of a performance. Physical transformation can be initiated from change in body chemistry on a hormonal level and develop physiological changes that result bodily effects like vomiting or losing consciousness. Sensate bodies switching themselves off or expelling contents in response to particular stimuli are examples seen in the audience as physical transformation in their bodies.

The invisible forces made visible where the audience’s physical bodies reconnect to their mind via the gut reaction and the nervous system response. “Sensation gives the invisible forces visibility. The invisible force is detected, flushed out and thus made visible.”42 The capabilities, limits and thresholds of the body that were previously invisible are now perceptible. The performance event serves as platform for the play of forces on the body, to reveal the feeling performers’ body and feeling audiences’ body by literally opening them up to their individual thresholds and new potentials.

The potential is located in the artwork itself before bodies encounter the work. It is transmitted from the artwork assemblage to the body through the object operating as the conduit. The potential is specific to each body and can be accessed through exploring the sensory ability of each and everybody, creating feeling bodies. This potential locates itself around this interaction where transformation is likely to take place.

Conclusions

*Use the forces*

My work brings specialized objects to the performance encounter that serves as a conduit between and within bodies. The objects function to extend the body beyond its boundaries. The works effectively operate to open the body, producing new surfaces and potentials in both the performer and the audience. The tools slice the skin, opening up the layers of skin increasing the surface area to volume ratio of the body. This produces more surfaces of the body to interact with other feeling bodies. Audience encounters with the cut skin, blood and the objects, allow those materials to develop in a performative way, where embedded signification is connected to the experience of the works. Scars remain from the hooks from suspension events, transforming my body both physically and emotionally. This subjective engagement draws connections between the bodies.

The re-contextualization of skin, blood and steel and the forces that act on them, which the process of making and performance produces, creates subjective transformations. The making and performance encounters afford an exploration of materials, highlighting the significance of blood, skin and the use of bodies as objects. My body is treated through all my works as an object but it remains a subject because I think and feel. Becoming an object that thinks and feels serves to disrupt conventional assumptions about the definitions and roles of subjects and objects divided as a dualism, where one cannot be the other. The works disrupt this dualism by questioning what is the subject and what is the object.

My bleeding body, documented from the performance event, allows the performance to live through documentation, framing the works as live art or living performance art. Documentation becomes the flesh of the performance event, when I, the artist am not physically present when the audience comes to encounter the installation.

Connecting the thinking body with a feeling mind in the works foregrounds the
disruption of Cartesian dualism. Alternatively the body as an inscribed surface of events that constitutes embodied subjectivity. Skin becomes a palimpsest inscribed repeatedly with social significance.

The forces of inscription are used and redirected, rewriting the body using the same tools used in medicine for those inscriptive processes that usually remain hidden from view. The forces of inscription are rendered perceptible in the works as cut, bleeding skin and produce new modes of inscription.

The objects encounter my body in many ways, by going through, cutting into, opening up, being worn on, performed, and re-performed with other bodies. Through this encounter some change or transformation is created and this can take many forms. This is done by the application and manipulation of forces acting on the body with the specialized performance objects.

The interaction of the audience during these events foregrounds the social forces that are at play when the audience is confronted with a hanging, bleeding body. Through the participation in the suspension event the audience become complicit—culpable co-conspirators. The audience has to confront the potential conflict created through enacting sadism by condoning the suffering as they watch without intervening.

The audience identifies with the body of the performer as another body like their own but their pity and empathy responses are interrupted and redirected because I have placed myself intentionally in this situation. Empathy and identification is an output of the interaction and this is why blood based performance and installation work produce potential futures through corporeal transformations.

The disruption of the dichotomy of subject and object offers the right set of circumstances to imagine an ethics created through witnessing blood based performance art. These circumstances create a moment of queer connectivity where this type of performance is able to cut through the safe distance furnished by fake representations of bleeding bodies in pain.
The works transform and challenge the roles of bodies between maker, performer and audience. The relocating of audience into performer creates a space for the ethics of performance and discloses performance as a potential queer connectivity.

All the works examined are constructed to sensitize the body, to open up the semi permeable membrane that comprises our body to other possible coherent collections of molecules. The objects created interact with other bodies to increase their sensitivity and bodily awareness. My performer’s body is literally opened during performance acting directly on the sensitivity of my body.

The connectedness of corporeal and emotional transformation is revealed through the different types of corporeal transformations that take place when making and performance impact on each another. Types of transformation include the changes that take place in the way we look at the world and the ways we choose to interact with others after witnessing blood based performance events. The ways in which bodies can be potentially transformed is limitless because everybody is different to start with. Particular objects can encourage transformation in a general direction but the specific outcome is undetermined and specific to each body. Performance events offer a space where potentiality can be accessed as audiences are given the opportunity to learn to feel more in terms of sensation as they think and feel through their bodies.
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Appendix A - Earlier works referenced by examined works

**Palimpsest**

5 x 316 LVM stainless steel tube forged finger quills 5cm x 1cm x 1cm
Installation included fabricated wooden lectern and LCD screen with images of finger quills performing *Palimpsest* on skin

These finger quills could draw up the blood from the body they were inscribing. The performing objects *Finger Quills* are designed to extend the fingertips with stainless steel quills where the wearer would be able to cut marks into the body with the finger quills thereby inscribing the skin with the wearer’s own blood.

Produced as part of my Master of Studio Arts candidature.

**2008** Installation exhibited at the Master of studio arts MSA graduate show

**2011** Presented at Sydney College of the Arts Postgraduate Exhibition
Exhibited in the awkward objects exhibition as part of the Utility symposium at Sydney College of the Arts in 2011.

**Intimacy Through Proximity**

316 LVM stainless steel cables and hooks 200cm x 10cm x 0.32cm
Audio visual equipment including 2 x data projectors and 2x pin hole cameras

**Performance**

I was connected to Gretchen Riordan by 2 x 2 metre stainless steel cables attached to flesh hooks in our backs. We moved away from each other towards images of the other, which were projected live in front of ourselves. Tents of skin rose up from our backs from the hooks to meet the stainless steel cable pull, which was attached through space to the other performing body that displayed their own body’s skins cape from the force. The pull was away from the physical body but towards each other’s live images projected in front.

Produced as part of my Master of Studio Arts candidature.

**2008** First performed at the Master of studio arts MSA graduate show
Catalogue of works presented for examination.

David

Breastplate forged from 316LVM stainless steel sheet - 30cm, 40cm x 10cm
Bow forged from 316LVM stainless steel rod and wire - 70cm x 20cm x 1.2cm
3 x skewers fabricated from 316LVM stainless steel - 25cm x .32cm x .32cm
12 x Borosilicate clear glass lamp worked arrows - 40cm x 2cm x .8cm
Single channel audio-visual projection of prior making and private performance events.

2010 First installation at the Untold exhibition at Sydney College of the Arts.
2011 Presented at Sydney College of the Arts Postgraduate Exhibition

Figure 40 David Installation 2012. Creative work presented for examination
Mark making Tools

5 x Scalpel handles forged from 316LVM stainless steel rod 8cm x 0.8 x 0.6
Installation included magnets, glass, LCD screen and audiovisual components.
Installation 120cm x 30cm x 30cm
Performance included single channel footage of making and performance events projected and shown inside installation.
2009 First exhibited as an installation the work as part of the Utility ‘Unbearable’ exhibition at Sydney College of the Arts.
2011 Installation in the Sydney College of the Arts Postgraduate exhibition.
Mark Making Tools was conceived through the earlier work Palimpsest

Figure 41 Mark Making Tools installation 2012. Creative work presented for examination
**Lines of Flight**

316LVM Stainless steel extensions  
2 x arm extensions 150cm x 10cm x 10cm  
2 x leg extensions 60cm x 15cm x 12cm with 2 x pre-fabricated stainless steel clips  
Suspension apparatus 200 cm x 60cm x 5cm  
Fabricated from 316LVM Stainless steel - tubing, balustrade fittings, chain, wire.  
Counter weights for suspension apparatus – cheesecloth, sand, rope.  

2009 First performed at the Time, Transcendence and Performance conference at Monash University in Melbourne.  

2011 Re-performed at the Sydney College of the Arts Postgraduate Exhibition. The Postgraduate Exhibition included an edited digital recording of the live performance projected on to the suspension apparatus, left to hang in the exhibition space.  

*Lines of Flight* was conceived through *Intimacy Through Proximity*  

Performance can be viewed - Bernadette Knight post graduation Exhibition SCA Sydney Uni  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgOGWMGCMtQ&list=UUkzl5RT609nmNBd45u4FZwQ&index=3&feature=plcp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgOGWMGCMtQ&list=UUkzl5RT609nmNBd45u4FZwQ&index=3&feature=plcp)

![Figure 42 Lines of Flight Installation 2012. Creative work presented for examination](image-url)