The Apprehension of Mortality

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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June 2017
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Bruce Ian Dickson

June 2017
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Abstract

To be fully conscious of one’s own imminent or eventual death is a solitary and repeated confrontation with finite reality. This is a time where one’s consciousness switches between truly knowing inevitable mortality and possibly finding refuge in the fullness of life. To be in ‘apprehension’ denotes being in fearful anticipation and has a quality of grasping, or taking hold. As time limited beings our approach to an intimate relationship with mortality may cause perplexity and fear while the meaning of death itself remains elusive. Fear and unknowing may promote the need to seek and hold meaning. This research project arises from my lived and observed experience of the fragility of human existence, an experience that highlights the transience of life and the impermanence of the material world. In my research practice I explore the moment of attempting to recognize my own inevitable death. I aim to evoke a contemplative response through the delivery of my research project, where questions of meaning relating to mortality can be addressed.

In considering the apprehension of mortality the philosophical approaches of Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Martin Heidegger and Kitaro Nishida are discussed alongside psychological and neurobiological interpretations of time and responses to mortality. Art practitioners such as Claire Morgan, Bill Viola, Lee Ufan, Len Lye and Laura Woodward are key to framing my approach to studio investigation. I find a material quality in the apprehension, or grasp, of mortality. Areas of practice include light, sculpture, photography, kinetic art, 3D design, rendering and printing, sound and video. Video projection emerges as the primary medium in the delivery of my project. An appreciation of expressions of time is significant in my research direction. Through involving the viewer in a time extended visual experience I aim to evoke a contemplative moment, in which repetition, movement, variation, duration, irresolution and yearning take place as human responses to mortality.
The Apprehension of Mortality
Knowing mortality, being fully conscious of one’s own eventual death, is intimately bound to being human. There can be a solitary and inconsolable moment of confrontation when the individual fully knows themselves to be bounded and finite. In this moment, the questioning mind switches between present exigencies and inevitable finalities, restless in desire for meaning and/or comfort. An intimation of mortality may be present at the edge of consciousness, forgotten in the movement and desire of living, or mortality may be brought to our direct attention by personal or global events. Recognition that life is finite may become more immediate as an individual ages, however awareness of this reality can occur at any stage of life, depending on one’s unique circumstances and sensitivities.

This dissertation and body of creative work explores the moment of apprehension of mortality. I use the term 'apprehension' to cover a dual meaning, containing the sense of being in fearful anticipation, and a sense of grasping, or of taking hold.¹ I approach an intimate awareness of mortality in both these senses, with a fearfulness, or at least curious concern in regard to the eventual reality of my own death. This project is an attempt to absorb and understand the experience of recognising finality.

A physical quality contained in the verb to apprehend suggests a sense of touching, or the intention to touch. The attempt to grasp the conceptual and material realities initiated by knowing one's own mortality is an intellectual and imaginative project with an inevitable emotional component. This may be expressed as a sense of longing, an unfulfilled desire to touch and retain knowledge of an individual's finite nature.

In this attempt there is a subjective response to experience that originates in psychological processes and is altered and confronted through interaction with the external world. My project is grounded on appreciation that transience, fragility and precariousness of being is unavoidably part of the human condition. My studio research is supported by lived experience and an investigation of phenomenological, psychological and philosophical approaches to human consciousness of mortality.

The material reality of existence is that the human or animal body ages and dies; inevitably through natural processes, or more intrusively, through injury or disease. It is not death itself that is the subject of this enquiry, but rather, societal and individual understanding of what meaning may be discovered in recognition of the limits of life. Many religious and spiritual belief systems offer stories of meaning to explain the realities of existence, generally claiming the continuation of consciousness in some form after material death. As described by science writer, Moti Ben-Ari, theological claims are often in conflict with other theologies and increasing scientific knowledge reduces the number of unknowns where theological explanation can be inserted. However, as scientific investigation addresses how things happen but not why they happen, the desire for meaning, certainty, and moral and ethical clarity remains unsatisfied. My position, in regard to both my studio work and research, is that I am unable to accept that there are absolute answers to questions initiated by mortality. Curiosity and critical examination emerge from recognition of fragility and impermanence.

To focus my PhD research, I foreground this wide field of human confrontation with mortality with my personal experience. I address the time when I recognise the full reality of the eventual consequence of life, the finite reality of my own death. In attempting to conceive of my own mortality, I have become aware of a reciprocal movement between an imagined mortality and the present moment, a dynamic made necessary by the unreachable character of the finite end of life. Contemplation of mortality, perceived, felt and experienced, may reside in this moment of restless switching. The aim of my project is to explore this experience through art practice research and exhibition installations.

INITIAL RESEARCH

I first encountered Claire Morgan’s, *Tracing Time*, 2007,\(^3\) as installed at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), in Hobart, 2011. Morgan’s practice foregrounds qualities of light and darkness to highlight a tenuous material presence of life and death. Her practice informed my site-specific installation, *fugitive presence*, at Spare Room, RMIT School of Art Galleries, in March 2014. (Fig. 2)

Material and conceptual themes of this artwork, including light, fragility and transience, feature in the initial phase of my research and are of continuing interest. In this work I draw on memories of a brief but significant period as member of a youth theatre company. This experience in theatre as both a writer and set maker was with the Canberra Youth Theatre in 1974-76. I was introduced to the company through their production of my play, “*... and it was here,*” which explored themes of alienation, death and a search for meaning.\(^4\) Aspects of theatrical production continue to reoccur as I consider material, technique and concept in my art practice.

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Fig 2. *fugitive presence,* (detail), plastic sheeting, acrylic sheet, LED lights, dowel, speaker; Spare Room, RMIT School of Art Galleries, 2014.
This approach has been further informed by visits to the theatrical spectacle of artworks at MONA, Hobart, in 2011 and 2015. These threads of reflection and experience combine to encourage me to investigate the effects of light in contained, stage-like spaces.

Michael Fried describes the 'theatrical' in art as work that includes viewer or audience as part of the total meaning, rather than the work being self-sufficient without the agency of the viewer. In this, a successful work of art should hold its entire meaning within its constituent parts. Fried proposes that successful art attempts an objectivity not influenced by the viewer's subjective position.

In my studio research I take the position that any artwork is experienced through a subjective framework. While an artwork may hold its presence as art through the meaning and effect of the relationships of its formal parts, the observer remains involved in the experience of art, their cultural, educational, psychological and physical attributes informing their response.

Theatrical set construction and lighting inform fugitive presence. Through these qualities of presentation and framing I explored notions of transience; the ephemeral and provisional stages of making were investigated. I constructed maquettes to investigate the staging of objects in both a contained and open context. (Fig. 3.)

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LED lights, wood and fine wire are used to materialise form, using light and shadow as a framing context. (Fig. 4.) Altering the intensity and projection of light can bring form into solid clarity or suggest an ephemeral nature to the material object.

I explored the provisional in artwork, where works are intentionally exhibited in an unfinished and unresolved state, exposing the artist’s working process and attempts to find resolution. These questions emerged during a process of rapid making, where incomplete or half-formed objects and immediately available materials were positioned in various ways to alter the reading of meaning. (fig. 5.) Through serving as the subject for photographic documentation the understanding of these objects could be further altered or enhanced. In this context the provisional nature of objects signified transience, perpetually tending toward resolution yet remaining incomplete.

The tension between the resolved and the unresolved remains an essential thematic stream in my research method. In artwork intended for exhibition I aim to express an ephemeral and provisional quality as aspects of resolved work. Throughout my practice photographic documentation serves as both record and inspiration for new work.

Fig. 4. light loop, LED strip, copper wire, glue, sticks, 2014.

Fig. 5. construction (1), dowel, plywood, LED strip, copper, wire, 2014.
Art Research

In my art practice, there is a translation of sorts between the art object and the language of conceptual reflection. The visually understood art object is enriched and refined by reciprocal translation between conceptually based reflection and the material project. As material metaphor and allusion impact on the observer in ways that cannot be fully expressed in words, the language of description moves around an art work, while the artwork exists both within and outside its description and analysis. Research described by John Hockey describes difficulties of identity experienced by Higher Degree students engaged in translation of this kind. Hockey describes a disjunct occurring between self-perception of one's identity as a creative individual and the disciplined requirements of a higher degree. It may be in the attempt to approach a synthesis of material meaning or allusion, with a language based description or analysis of an artwork, that further understanding or significance is reached.

In written responses, theoretical or poetic, during the progression from an initial idea to resolution, associations of material and meaning become more identifiable. When my artwork is in exhibition or other display, it holds the potential for ongoing differences in interpretation, extending my understanding through variations of context and responses of other viewers. Evidence of research resides in the formation of knowledge through the viewer’s interaction with the work, as well as the investigative processes of production. According to Graeme Sullivan, "When art practice is theorized as research, it is argued that human understanding arises from a process of inquiry that involves creative action and critical reflection." Sullivan recognises the complex cognitive processes that are involved in the choice and manipulation of media, context and language during the initiation and completion of an art work. In an earlier work Sullivan writes of the centrality of "experience as it is lived, felt, reconstructed, reinterpreted and understood... meanings are made rather than found as human knowing is transacted, mediated, and constructed in social context."

Awareness of one's own mortality requires a willingness to place oneself outside the everyday context of life to engage with a perspective where individual life is seen as part of a universal process of life and death. My art practice explores this process, a switching between being fully in lived experience, and being actively aware of my own mortality.

METHODOLOGY

The recognition of one’s relationship with mortality can be confronting in its immediacy. The experience can also contain a sense of integration, in being part of the natural history of living. A sense of transience develops from this understanding, informing the direction of my visual and theoretical research.

As I place myself in consciousness of my own mortality, I find myself switching between an imagined site of mortality and a return to the living present moment, a position from where I would again reach for understanding of my own transience. In this process of switching both life and mortality are held in simultaneous awareness.

The following questions form the intent of my research practice:

How do I identify and evoke a moment when an individual consciously apprehends awareness of being existent in life, simultaneously to knowledge of eventual non-existence?

Which visual practice most essentially elicits the simultaneous, durational and emotive factors of the moment of comprehension of individual mortality? And can sonic practice also serve to describe and induce awareness of this moment in the listening individual?

The methodology has arisen from these questions to guide my research and practice.

Repetition

I identify repetition in the imaginative reach toward experiential understanding of mortality, and a return to appreciation of immediate present experience. I conceptualise this as a vibration, or oscillation, where consciousness oscillates repeatedly between opposing and interdependent positions of life and finitude.

Patterns of repetition emerge as basic markers of existence, human and animal actions are repeated constantly with little variation. Much human interaction depends upon repeatability. For example, repeated forms of word and action are necessary for communication. The unique and unrepeatable may only be relevant as the precursor to a form that will endure. Gilles Deleuze portrays repetition as a process that allows space for creativity, a transformative form of repetition that promotes change, variation and difference, rather than a mechanical succession of complete similarity. For Deleuze, Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘Eternal Return’ is not the repetition of history, but rather the repetition of a force acting to assert change. The notion of return expressed by this concept opposes the psychoanalytic theory of the return of the repressed, as it refers to the repeated intrusion into the conscious mind of suppressed or denied aspects of personality or drives. Repetition as expressed by Deleuze

is creative not pathological. This kind of repetition can be seen to exist in the evolution of species and in the intricate movements of the universe.

**Variation**

Within repetition there is change, variation in the movement outward and from the point of return. This variation within repetition can be a source of new form. The evolutionary argument is that lasting change occurs through the selection of beneficial mutation. A similar process of variation and ongoing transformation can apply to conscious knowledge of an individual’s mortality. There is repeated confrontation with the reality of one’s finite life and conscious return to everyday living, that is changed by that confrontation and the change that occurs in the ongoing necessities of existence. Each repetition changes in quality, through response to the previous event combined with one’s psychological state at the time of repetition. There is a change in the emotive component, in the acceptance or resistance felt, in a familiarity with mortality that increases through each cycle of the attempt to reach and maintain an apprehension of finite consciousness.

There is psychological variation in quotidian human experience. It is unusual for an individual to be in exactly the same state emotionally and psychologically during the course of a day or one day to the next. The individual may experience a similar situation, varied due to internal and external influences. A situation may repeat, but cannot be the same.

**Duration**

In 'duration' I refer to the moment where an individual attempts conscious awareness of their own mortality, and then returns to awareness of their living self. This oscillation between an unreachable state and the becoming known can be a brief moment or potentially infinite in extent.

In discussing consciousness as states of awareness lined up next to each other, Henri Bergson claims that in order to perceive this line "it is necessary to take up a position outside it, to take account of the void which surrounds it, and consequently to think a space of three dimensions." Bergson describes duration as time understood and experienced separate from spatial experience. He describes “a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another," this being a continuum made up of an infinite number of parts.

In my project, time emerges as a theme relating to psychological

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13. Ibid., 103.
experience, embodied through vision, touch and hearing, and sited in space. Time is experienced with space, dependent on the material reality of the body and the neurological substrate of consciousness.

Psychological research embeds human behaviour within the notion of the individual’s perception of time. Attention, content and context are shown to be significant in perception of time. Artworks hold the capacity to mould experience of time through engaging the observer with the artwork’s unfolding content. This process embeds the observer’s experience of the artwork in both real and subjective dimensions of space and time. Christine Ross discusses how art video can "disrupt dominant conventionalities of time, notably acceleration and temporal linearity." Ross references the artist Bill Viola’s practice of garnering attention by concentrating on minor details in the image, and the slowing down of movement through manipulation of film and/or digital file. Ross further discusses the contemporary use of the loop to extend and explore duration through repetition.

Irresolution

I find irresolution in the moment where understanding of mortality is attempted, but not attained. My experiential understanding of mortality is based on uncertain subjectivity, and external or received knowledge is open to challenge. In this moment of irresolution an immutable understanding of mortality evades certainty.

Certainty of knowledge may not be possible as our knowledge of the world may be subjectively influenced or biased. A sceptical approach maintains that even apparently empirical knowledge depends on consensus and may be refuted.

The moment of apprehension of mortality is one that opens into uncertainty. In this moment conceptions of god, eternity and philosophies of meaning may emerge. For me it is a point which allows refusal of imagined consolation, where knowledge of death allows an indwelling recognition of transience, neither celebratory or tragic.

Yearning describes my personal response to apprehending mortality. In my research project is an unfulfilled desire to resolve the movement of consciousness between knowing its own extinction, and being engaged in the processes of living. It is a desire to arrive at a still point where knowledge of death and nothingness is experienced as necessary and simultaneous to knowledge of life. Although the material ending, death and decay of the human body is inevitable, it is not always easy for people to regard the end of the intimate self-awareness of their internal and external world, the end of individual consciousness, as a material reality.

In response, religions and spiritual philosophies describe, in various ways, a continuity of consciousness after death. At this point in my life, through my understanding of a science-based view of existence, and a wish-fulfilment aspect to religion, I accept that consciousness is extinguished at death. However, I find it difficult to truly rest easily with the idea of extinction, so there remains a desire for some kind of answer beyond the purely material. This uneasiness may be an aspect of human development, arising from the neurophysiology of consciousness. In his text, *The Mind in the Cave*, David Lewis-Williams argues that visions and intuitions born from naturally occurring states of altered consciousness within the brain formed the genesis of religion in Palaeolithic times, and continue to be present in the make-up of the modern human, accessible through dreams and mind altering substances.¹⁹ These visions and intuitions hold a deep emotional resonance, forming a sense of boundless connection that inspires belief and faith in conceptions of spiritual truth. Appreciating that a need for transcendent solutions to existence may arise from the physiology of the brain does not, however, eliminate a yearning for resolution when faced with mortality. A desire for consolation continues.

PERSONAL CONTEXT

In part, the theme of my research is a consequence of my personality, formed through the interplay of genetically inherent characteristics and my family and social context. My father was a teacher, and my mother was a nurse. Both had been evangelical Christians, leaving the church to become secular agnostics before I was born. I was brought up agnostic, with a secular world view that appreciated the human need for deep experience and a purpose greater of their immediate needs or everyday experience. After leaving school my first attempts to find direction and meaning were through university and art school. I did not complete these courses, instead seeking a path I could find more immediately meaningful. After some trial and error, I gained a certificate in nursing. I have now been working in general and psychiatric nursing for many years, while maintaining an art practice.

Nursing work enables relationships with a variety of people, and at the same time requires a professional distance to be maintained. This distance is necessary for the work to be done effectively and to protect one’s self from being overly affected by the emotional and psychological demands of the profession. When involved in direct care of others there is a need to balance an intimate involvement with practical detachment, a dynamic requiring constant attention. I have found this provides both structure and distanced reflection in dealing with human interaction. This quality of emotional investment and observational distance carries through from my nursing work into my art practice.

The death of a person under one's professional care is a relatively common experience for nurses, dependent on their area of practice. Soon after completing my nursing certificate, while working in a medical ward and in the emergency department, I was confronted with some of the more raw and immediate patient deaths. I recall speaking to a colleague about the effect of working with people’s pain and fear, and how this creates a particular perspective on everyday life. This offers a way to be aware of and accept suffering and death through conscious knowledge of their place within everyday existence.

A significant part of my nursing experience was my time at a residential facility for people with an inherited degenerative neurological disease, Huntington's Disease, an illness that has no current cure. Over a ten year period I worked in the facility and had intimate involvement with the physical and emotional needs of these people. The residents could be at the centre for a long time, until their death from secondary causes. As a result staff at the facility knew the residents well, being involved in their lives as much, or more, than their own family.

There were two residents at the facility whose deaths affected me strongly at the time. Those experiences inform the background
understanding that underlies my research. One was a man who had been at the facility for close to seven years while I worked there. He was a strong personality, despite the effects of disease, eliciting intense emotional responses from those who worked with him. I arrived at work one afternoon to find that he had died and was laid out in a room of the facility. He would have been in his late forties. My response to this man's death was complex. I felt a sense of loss at the sudden ending of his presence in the world, together with a sense of relief that his difficulties were now over. I knew that in some way his unexpected death had keyed into my own emotional state, and that I needed to recover from my response and continue my duties in charge of the shift.

The other resident whose death affected me was a woman, in her early sixties, who had been at the facility for eight to ten years. It had become clear that her condition was deteriorating and that she was dying. On the night she died a work colleague and I were by her side at the moment of death. Her death was quiet, a barely noticeable transition from breathing to stillness. In this subtle moment it was though nothing had happened yet something significant occurred.

As I bring these memories into the present they elicit an immediate psychological, physical and visual content. In some memories a feeling of distress embedded in memory is combined with reflective content from the present, attributing thoughts and feelings to the remembered event that may not have been part of the experience at the time. Although they were very different in tone, both these deaths required a response to the human condition that continues in my work and research. This is a need to be emotionally engaged with mortality, to be respectful of the variety of responses to death, while also being observant and responsive to the wider and less personal context of human existence.

Over the years I have come across a range of human suffering and resilience, through which I have developed an intimate awareness of the fragility of life. Many of the people I have come across through work have been chronically ill, mentally and physically debilitated, or have died during the time I knew them. Both my parents are deceased. At a different times friends and acquaintances have become ill or died. These events have brought mortality to my immediate attention, and underlie my understanding of human fragility and transience.
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT

To appreciate some of the complexities contained in the apprehension of mortality it is necessary to consider the different responses people may have to the fear or reality of imminent death.

In *Psychological Inquiry*, Tom Pyszczynski and co-authors, discuss research on fear of death. They express particular concern with perceived existential threats such as terrorism. Their concept of 'Terror Management Theory' covers defensive and self-affirming positions, including promoting the superiority and exclusivity of a cultural group, defending against or destroying alternative world views, strengthening relationship bonds within the group. The authors claim that many cultural studies reinforce that persisting and present fear of death affects decisions and behaviour. These may be as direct as nationalism, or as tangential as “interpersonal attraction, romantic love, charitable giving … reactions to simple physical sensations, cancer prevention and health promotion behavior …”

In the same issue of *Psychological Inquiry*, Philip Cozzolino describes a theory that combines this defensive attitude with an alternative growth-focused response to one’s immediate or threatened mortality. The author concentrates on the life affirming motivation that some people discover in themselves when confronted with terminal illness, and the growth of self-reliance, compassion, and meaning in life found by some survivors of trauma. Cozzolino proposes that the defensive response follows from a non-specific awareness of a looming possibility or threat of death, and growth from a specific and immediate threat. He claims that research in cognitive neuroscience supports his concept of a dual system of response to existential threat that can exist in the one individual.

Irvin Yalom writes from experience as a therapist to those individuals whose lives are diminished by their fear of death. Yalom does not seek to eliminate existential fear, but works find a productive way of adapting to these realities. He aims to overcome fear through facing death as co-existent with life and integral to finding meaning. Yalom states, “Although the physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us.” Yalom turns to Epicurus for inspiration, using his philosophical ideas to address the realisation that it is the fear

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22. Ibid., 329


26. Ibid., 33.
of death’s inevitability which is a persistent cause of unhappiness. Fear of death may be managed by an individual’s awareness and response to mortality. In response to different life circumstances, the idea of one’s own death may be seen as a welcome finality, or as something to be feared and defended against.

Research into the apparent lived experience of dying, the phenomena of near death experience, offers insight into how the human consciousness responds to knowledge of its finite state. Knowledge of death itself remains an horizon that can be passed only by speculation; whether religious, metaphysical or science-based. Near death experiences, as discussed by Juan Saavedra-Aquilar and Juan Gómez-Jeria, are reported to be experienced by individuals who have been ill and close to death, yet have recovered, as well as people who have experienced imminent death through accident or injury. These experiences have a number of aspects in common, which the authors discuss in relation to neurophysiology, particularly temporal lobe dysfunction. The authors state: “We are not saying that the NDE is a variety of TLE, but that its phenomenology arises from the abnormal functioning of similar portions of the central nervous system.”

Susan Blackmore and Tom Troscianko refer to out-of-body and near-death experiences having been put forward by some commentators as indication of an integrated conscious existence after death. These experiences have been investigated and challenged in scientific research, there being a significant difficulty in determining empirical proof of the individual’s subjective experience. Neurological studies endeavour to determine a neurobiological basis for out-of-body and near-death experiences. Discussing various neurophysiological hypotheses for near-death experiences, Blackmore and Troscianko conclude that “These theories entail no other worlds and hold out no hope for survival of death. Nevertheless … we think they provide a stepping stone to understanding its numinous and life-changing qualities.”

Another potential response to mortality can be the overwhelmingly nihilistic responses of some individuals to traumatic events in their past. My experience in psychiatric nursing indicates that for some individuals the prospect of staying in the present moment is more painful than escaping into death. Contemplation of death as relief from suffering is as real in circumstances of psychological trauma as with those seeking relief from intolerable physical pain. During my nursing work a number of people have expressed to me their wish to

27. Yalom, Staring at the Sun, 3.
30. Ibid. 27.
die. For these people the palliative aspect of mortality is in a desire to be free of a burden rather than for death in itself. The end of life may be conceived of as a necessary and inevitable step, containing both loss and relief.

These different responses to mortality indicate the importance of the presence of death during one's life, whether acknowledged as such or not. In my research practice I aim to evoke a recognition of finality that while not stark, is psychologically present, allowing contemplation of aspects of mortality.

Fig. 6. *boundary*, LED strip, electrical wires, alligator clips, BluTack, 2014.
MORTALITY AND TIME

Facing Mortality

My practice-led project is partly driven by a response to my own and other’s lived experience. In my art practice I make work that exists in, and depends upon the experiential world. This is formed in material, emotional and conceptual content generated from the exigencies of physical existence. In my research project I explore philosophical approaches to human mortality. I present a brief overview of certain philosophical perspectives on the centrality of mortality to attempt to discover meaning in human existence.

In his text *Way to Wisdom*, Karl Jaspers discusses the drive toward understanding or coming to an accommodation with existence. He writes that, “The ultimate situations – death, chance, guilt and the uncertainty of the world – confront me with failure.” Jaspers continues that, “In ultimate situations man either perceives nothingness or senses true being in spite of and above all ephemeral worldly existence.” The human capacity for awareness of our own mortality is perhaps the most truly ultimate situation. In commentary regarding Karl Jaspers, Filiz Peach refers to the important feature of “boundary situations” (those situations which threaten our sense of security and the foundation of our existence) of which the most important is death...” From my contemporary viewpoint the moral loading of terms like guilt and failure, does not have the same significance as for Jaspers. While death, chance and uncertainty impede an individual’s potential, to see this as failure rather than an essential aspect of normal existence exhibits a particular moral and cultural perspective. The concept of ‘boundary situations’ continues to be significant, indicating the limiting factors an individual confronts that cause a re-assessment of everyday existence.

While writing on psychotherapy Irvin Yalom refers to awareness of death as a boundary situation that may cause profound disruption and anxiety, and yet lead to an increased value to life. Yalom goes on to refer to Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre as noting “… that one must invent one's own meaning (rather than discover God's or nature's meaning) and then commit oneself fully to fulfilling that meaning. ... On this one point most Western theological and atheistic existential systems agree: it is good and right to immerse oneself in the stream of life.”

In *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, written toward the end of his life...
life, Gilles Deleuze refers to the 'plane of immanence'. According to Deleuze immanence appears as a quality that is impersonal and universal, that expresses itself through a subject or object, and yet is separate. Pure immanence is “a life, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life.” Deleuze does not appear to be referring to the specific life of an individual but of a quality common to individual lives that is life itself. There is no transcendence to this idea of a life. Transcendence is subsumed in the plane of immanence as a 'becoming' in the flow of consciousness, not in terms of individual sensory impressions, but the space between.

Martin Heidegger is known for addressing the notion of death as integral within an individual's lived understanding of life. This proposes an awareness of mortality as an event that occurs in its full extent to the individual alone. Following this thought, the deaths of others are experienced as external events, and can only be recognised and understood to a limited degree, not as the individual who dies understands. One's own mortality can not be avoided, even if another were to die in one's place, this does not diminish the certainty of one's own death. According to David Cerbone “Heidegger’s discussion of death is meant to make Da-sein's (being's) finitude phenomenologically available, to be experienced, or better, faced up to.”

While discussing Heidegger, Michael Wheeler's article refers to Jean-Paul Sartre's view that being focused toward death is not a meaningful way to experience life as death is inevitable, outside of an individual’s possible choices of ways to be. As death is outside the individual's capacity to enact choice and decision, and in effect destroys choice, an awareness of mortality is not seen to have a place in a person's ability to freely choose how to be in the world. In a discussion of connections between Existentialism and Buddhism, J. Jeffrey Franklin summarises some of Sartre’s thought as claiming that “authentic being-for-itself is freedom, which requires choosing anguish over bad faith, which means living in and as desire”, further stating “Human existence is defined by the cycling nexus of freedom, lack, suffering, and desire.” Franklin then goes on to propose how “human suffering, the alleviation of it and its relationship to desire” is a primary issue for Buddhism.

In Buddhist practice a deep awareness of mortality through

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37. Ibid. 25.
40. Wheeler, "Martin Heidegger"
meditation on the transience of existence, is seen to be essential for an individual to find release from suffering. Two main areas of meditation in Theravada Buddhism are described by George Bond. Firstly, to meditate on death as a concept, that the individual’s life will inevitably end, and so understanding that to be is to be impermanent. Secondly, to meditate on the decomposition and decay of the body, and therefore to confront oneself with material evidence of bodily decay. The intention of these meditations is to bring the practitioner into a state of freedom from attachment to the body and the world, which thereby brings release from the worldly associations that bring suffering. Death is seen as that state that brings about the “dissolution of the aggregates, the factors constituting the individual.” In Bond’s description, Buddhism conceptualises death as integral to existence, as death prefigures rebirth and continued suffering. Through an understanding of life’s impermanence, an individual can potentially accept the true nature of mortality.

I have found further understanding on what may underlie mortality through approaching the theories of the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida. Nishida proposes a ‘nothingness’ as the final absolute of existence, containing all the elements that make up our perceived reality while being no particular thing. According to Tiziano Tosolini, for Nishida, “... our consciousness is founded on an original and pre-reflective intuition in which the unity between object and subject has not yet been separated.” This nothingness underlies both being and emptiness, it is beyond dualism rather than being a synthesis of oppositions. Tosolini describes Nishida's 'Absolute Nothingness', as a place reached through a process of self-examination and reflection on the self-examining self, until reaching a place where all things, concepts, and contradictions cohere in a unity that does not dissolve their separateness, described as a place of no-self. This understanding of Nishida’s philosophy is expanded by Jin Baek, relating Nishida’s description of a simultaneity of consciousness between the self and other, the self and world, that is grounded in the enveloping nothingness that underlies all existence. Where there is no self and no other, there is a nothingness from which growth of self is inextricably linked with intuitive knowledge of the other.

Baek discusses Nishida’s concept of shintai, where the body, as a “tool of nothingness”, is filled by the world, itself grounded in nothingness

44. Ibid. 213.
and overflows through creative action into art.\textsuperscript{46} As a conceptual and material entity originating from emptiness, art is an expression of nothingness enacted through the sensory capacity of the artist. This form of creation can be then seen to surpass consciousness and be embedded in a universal nothingness.

Baek continues his discussion with reference to Lee Ufan, a Japanese/Korean artist influenced by Nishida. Joan Kee describes how a specific area of Lee Ufan’s artwork uses repetition of particular motifs produced by manipulating a single brush stroke or brush point, repeated until fading into illegibility.\textsuperscript{47} These works serve to indicate Lee’s response to Nishida, where a form of self-negation is contained within the work, situating the work and the observer within a field of simultaneity that is grounded in nothingness.\textsuperscript{48} These works do not attempt to portray the object empty of meaning, but allow the work, through its quiet repetition, to extend itself in the same space as the observer, in a simultaneity of self, other, world and nothingness.

In my art practice I intend to engage the viewer in the space and time where mortality is as present as life. I aim to evoke concepts of simultaneity, and of nothingness and its constituent parts. Lee Ufan’s response to Nishida informs the moment I aim to evoke, an integration of opposites that accepts contradiction without seeking a synthesis that dissolves the parts.

In the vibration of awareness between finality and being in life is the tension of one’s tenuous existence, always contingent on change and death. This moment of vibration is a duration that is both instantaneous and infinite, containing oppositions of life and death, the unanswerable question of their resolution, in a perpetual dynamic. The existential writings discussed here emphasise the significance that recognition of a person’s own mortality has in colouring their response to life.

\textsuperscript{46} Baek, "From the Topos of Nothingness", 86.
\textsuperscript{48} Baek, Ibid.
Experience Within Time

Through my artwork I suggest an experience of extended time where the viewer may approach differing perspectives on their own mortality. The moment of knowing mortality occurs within the flow of time yet is a moment subjectively variable in duration. The extended time of my artwork invites the viewer into the mental and emotional space to appreciate individual meaning. With a pared down use of material, metaphor and technique I concentrate on a reduced and focused sensory experience, encouraging reflection within an extended time frame.

In my research project I appreciate the individual's subjective experience of time as significant. In individual experience concepts of time and mortality are intertwined. Mortality is an imminent possibility from the time of conception and travels with an individual throughout their life. This is exemplified in Russell Hoban's novel, *Pilgermann*, where death is characterised in the character of 'brother doorkeeper', who accompanies the protagonist, Pilgermann throughout his life, growing and ageing with him. A relationship that is loving and acrimonious develops between Pilgermann and his own death, with each dependant on the other for their existence. In this literary work Pilgermann escapes time after his death, continuing to exist as narrator with access to the full extent of time.

In the moment of mortality awareness central to my artwork the dimensions of time are flexible, being both instantaneous and potentially infinite in duration, both separately and simultaneously. This ephemeral moment serves as metaphor for the inherent fragility of conscious existence. Writing in the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Roger Cook hypothesizes a change in an individual's awareness of their inner world around the point of death, that, through a psychological process of time dilation, leads to a sense of the infinite. He argues that this engages an individual's imagination in a deeply intimate creative act of fulfilment.

Subjective experience of time will vary in response to internal and external factors. In Hancock and Block's review of psychology research on the subject of time, the authors highlight the importance of understanding of time in relation to human experience. They discuss the intangible nature of a sense of time, as distinct from the sensory input that relates to physical phenomena. The authors reference the importance of individual differences in assessing time intervals and the effect that attention has on these assessments.

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Christine Ross also discusses the importance of attention in relation to the viewer’s experience of an art work. Ross describes the viewer experiencing a subjective sense of extended duration in response to a video loop, suggesting that more focussed attention to information within a time frame is expected. In this extended moment of duration a more receptive and enriched attention can become available, allowing the viewer to experience and contemplate both a sense of an eternal present, and a finite end.

Through periodically slowing and stretching time to bring the moving image almost to stillness, my work aims to evoke a contemplative state that encourages the viewer to reflect on their own mortality. My practice explores time as a virtual, imagined space that is embodied in the physicality of the individual, attempting to apprehend the reality of their finite state. In her essay, “In-Between: The Natural in Architecture and Culture,” Elizabeth Grosz reflects on a virtual space positioned as ‘in-between’. Grosz proposes that, “The space of the in-between is that which is not a space, a space without boundaries of its own, which takes on and receives itself, its form, from the outside ...”. This is a space and duration of both thought and activity, that enables and recognises processes of change and transformation. It is a space where binary opposites are not required to be resolved.

The space and time of mortality awareness requires movement between two positions: of being in life, embedded in movement of its own physicality and in linear time; and of being with the knowledge of one’s own death, itself on an horizon always just out of reach. One is aware of time, place and movement, of an inner restlessness that seeks to find stillness through a means of knowing that is only realised by the final passage into death itself.

52. Christine Ross, "The Temporalities of Video," 83.
ASPECTS OF PRACTICE

The Moving Image

I have used photographic documentation throughout my research practice. Documentary images have been used to review work and inform further iterations, and have been reworked into resolved images or works in themselves. In recent research my use of the photograph has evolved into exploration of the moving image. This has been used in similar fashion to the still image, informing further experiment or as resolution of a concept for exhibition. Digital video offers an accessible, adaptable and flexible medium. Digital cameras are capable of both still and video photography, and digital files are relatively simple to process. These aspects give the digital image a sketch-like quality, facilitating the construction and evocation of concepts and open to being processed toward a resolved image in themselves.

In the introduction to her text *Installation and the Moving Image* Catherine Elwes writes that the term moving image “emphasises the dynamic element” common to the works she discusses, and that the term “implies a lack of discrimination between artist and technician, often one and the same individual.”\(^5^4\) In my practice the capacity to be both artist and technician enables a flexibility, spontaneity and depth of research, where access to technique facilitates and informs content. This is often conveyed through the transient and ephemeral electromagnetic characteristics of the video image. The author describes an ephemeral nature to the technology, analogue videotape being often difficult to edit, materially fragile and easily degraded.

Advances in video technology through integration with computer software have minimised the material fragility and editing difficulties of video, at the same time establishing an increasingly virtual recording space. As visual and sonic information is now encoded through software into digital storage there is no substantial material evidence remaining. As a result of this technological shift there is a pragmatic and conceptual trace of data in the storage, software and hardware path. When not translated to visual representation, digital video is a form of physical abstraction, embedded on a DVD surface or in other memory technology, or coded for the internet and held as physical memory in a physically situated server. The visual record is encoded and only recovered through the use of specific machines. This can present a fragile or ephemeral character to an otherwise durable technology.

The methods of presenting the moving image, whether on an LCD screen, or through digital projection, engage with the ephemeral through the characteristics of the medium. The image is accessible only when the technology is powered, it otherwise exists only as

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potential. Changes in recording apparatus have left some older forms of technological record inaccessible, and there can be degradation of quality in electronic archiving. These aspects bring about questions of decay, the entropic dissolution of organic and inorganic form.

Video, through recent improvements in availability and ease of use in terms of manipulation and editing, has brought the moving image into contemporary art practice. At its origin, video art was intrinsically embedded in the medium, and the benefits and limitations of video tape, live performance, recording, and television. Concepts of time were explored in the medium. Kaye describes Nam June Paik, a seminal figure in video art, as addressing “... multi-media and, specifically, a multiplied performance, where time, in its performance, is subject to variability, difference and multiplication.”

Light and movement, even when minimal, invite the viewer’s attention to the experience of image and duration. My use of video focusses on movement of paper and cloth, made present and transformed by lighting. The movement in the video arose from photographic documentation of experiments with temporary sculptural form. Activation of the sculptural form required video documentation, which in turn led to resolved video work.

With video I am faced with choices in regard to the medium of presentation, whether on a computer monitor, LCD screen, or as projection. Projection enables me to experiment with a freedom of scale and placement. With projection mapping software an image can be integrated into the architecture of an exhibition, potentially removing the distinctions between image, screen and space.

In the contemporary context of familiarity with film and video viewers will likely be aware of the technology of projection, at the least on the periphery of vision. In my work I aim to include the projector in the design of the exhibition in a straightforward manner, neither disguised or dominating. My intention is to use the architecture of the exhibition space as a supporting environment for the moving image, an integration that invites the viewer to become absorbed in the surrounding ambience as well as experience of the projected image itself. There may be something immersive in this process, allowing oneself to be subsumed in an event, as in waiting in the dark for a film to start, attending a place of worship, or being in a familiar darkened room watching TV. The integration of technology, including video, into immersive environments has a contemporary presence. In an article in for the Los Angeles Times, online, February 2017, Deborah Vankin describes a proliferation of immersive theatre, art and architectural works. Vankin refers to one reason for this being a desire to return to material presence in the contemporary digitally


mediated era. Through presenting projection in an exhibition space empty of inessential content, I aim to invite contemplation of our mortality.

Notions of time are significant in my artwork. The observer is invited to allow time for movement to unfold. In my exhibitions *anticipating stillness*, at c3 Gallery, and *an apprehension of mortality*, at Counihan Gallery, both in 2016, video looping is used for a specific purpose. In the base duration of the video, moments of action, stillness, and time are repeated with variations. This initial sequence is repeated by the looping process. The loop is played throughout the time of exhibition, allowing for an infinite progression of a given sequential repetition. In this use of the video loop time becomes meaningless as a sequence is endlessly repeated, repetition becomes the means of marking moments of change in form or effect.

The relationship of art-video to music and sound has been described by Nick Kaye, in his text *Multi-media: video - installation - performance*, as being more salient than its relationship to film or photography.\(^\text{57}\) My use of sound in video features time and repetition. An underlying audio-drone is used in my experimental work *vibration machine*, 2015, and in the video derived from this. The drone is also used with video in the exhibition, *anticipating stillness*, c3 Gallery, 2016. A pulse of sound, in the former, and a static-like sound, in the latter, rise above the drone, forming moments of repetition and variation.

In my later exhibition, *an apprehension of mortality*, at Counihan Gallery, 2016, the videos were presented without sound. Sound is expected with video, its absence is noticeable, focussing more attention on nuances of movement in the projections. The time scale of the exhibition is extended as arbitrary environmental sound becomes more prominent as a worldly accompaniment to the abstracted artwork. In this way contemplation of mortality is positioned as both separate to and integrated in the everyday.

**Brielle Hansen**

The Melbourne artist Brielle Hansen presents a number of video works in her Master's thesis, *Sensing Experience*, including *Loaded* (2004). In this work video of a figure under sheets is projected down onto a bed in the middle of a dark room. There is a sensuality of form in tension with an ephemeral virtual presence. Although not specifically about mortality, Hansen's work is significant in its reference to use of video and projection. In *Loaded* Hansen sets the projection screen as a horizontal object drawn from the quotidian material world. Her interest is to create a scene that is an immersive installation, a mediated virtuality that remains sensual as well as poetic, offering a silent, enclosed space of contemplation.

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\(^\text{57}\) Kaye, *Multi-media*, 12.
In Hansen’s piece, intermittent sensual form presents itself and falls away. In images presented in her thesis, the room is dark, and the video projection on the bed in the middle of the room provides the only light. There is an almost reverential atmosphere, with figures contemplating the central body of light in which a figure gradually takes shape and disappears. Attention is concentrated on a focal point of light where the slow, yet significant, action takes place. Hansen writes: “Time, through duration and pace, draws one’s attention to being, and to one’s body within space, which can in turn highlight the dynamic between being and our understanding of reality.”

In my video work I use paper, still and in movement, as a means to refer to the body. There is a skin-like quality to paper, and suggestion of bodily volume in the manner in which paper can fold and bend. Repetition and changes of timing in my video bring attention to moments of embodiment.

Similar to sound, the inherent duration of the moving image exists due to elapsed time, a period where there is potential for many events to occur, or for nothing to happen. Strategic use of looped time allows the viewer space to access and review the content, in manner similar to experience of a static image or spatial work that can be absorbed at the viewer’s pace. Repeated content within the loop can be seen as similar to development of a musical theme, with variation and coda.

The structure of a video loop is itself a form of repetition, a circular time event moving through a linear time context, potentially varying through the perceptions of the viewer at different stages of the loop.

**Bill Viola**

A text in the catalogue for Bill Viola’s 1997 retrospective at the Whitney Museum, describes the artist’s role working at Everson Museum of Art as technical assistant for various artists. These included Peter Campus, an artist interested in the psychology and physiology of perception, and Nam June Paik, who dealt with philosophical attributes of video, including portraying time through notions of chance understood through Zen Buddhism. From this time Viola established a body of work that while secular is informed by spiritual and artistic traditions.

Writing on Viola's work, David A. Ross of the Whitney Museum suggests that “… though life and death have often been his subject, his concern is not loss, but rather the sublime and the possibility of spiritual transcendence.” Viola presents moments of intense human interest, the meetings and partings of relationships, response to destabilising unexpected events, and confrontation with mortality. In *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, Viola remarks “it is the

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awareness of our own mortality that defines the nature of human beings...".61

A survey exhibition of Bill Viola’s practice, ‘The Passions’, was exhibited at Australian National Gallery in Canberra, in 2005. The exhibition included the work 5 Angels for the Millennium. This was a five channel, video projection with stereo sound, projected onto the full height of the wall of a large, dark hall. The gallery text describes the work as overwhelming in size, sound and content.62

The content of the exhibition referenced an underlying psychological state, with slow-motion action enabling an almost visceral response to experience. On my visit to the exhibition I found the grandiose size and church-like atmosphere to be an obstacle to immersion. I found technique more present than content. In the smaller works in the exhibition the technology of the video enhanced the intended reading. The content, which referenced Medieval Christian art, was emotionally evocative. However, viewed from my non-religious background, the work was reduced rather than enhanced through the explicit religious reference. References to specific spiritual traditions risk being understood as being specific to that tradition, not inclusive of the variety of human experience.

Mortality is also addressed in Viola’s Ocean Without a Shore, exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2008. In this video a series of people approach and partially penetrate a veil of water before turning away. Viola makes use of video and sound of falling water, and extremely slowed time, presented in a dark, church-like setting. Initially created for the 2007 Venice Biennale, where it was installed in a church, Viola describes the work as being “about the presence of the dead in our lives”.63 In the video a series of actors approach a veil of water, expressing a variety of emotional states. The predominant emotional tone appears to be pleading, a reaching out through the water and out of the plane of the video, before the person inevitably turns away and retreats into the background. The transition from life to death, or through life toward death, is open for question, Viola does not offer answers. This is reinforced by the artist reference to his work being based “in unknowing, in doubt, in being lost, in questions and not answers ...".64

In writings and interviews Viola refers to mystical and transcendent traditions of art, claiming a role in returning to this practice. Viola addresses the theme of mortality by exploring psychological and emotional responses. Grandiose, mystical and spiritual themes,

64. Viola, Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House, 250.
such as the pathos of death and communication beyond death are
addressed. Viola’s work is predominantly figurative, using the body
directly to engage the viewer and demonstrate the physicality of the
conceptual concerns of his artwork. His frequent use of extreme slow
motion draws attention to expression of transitory emotions.

The use of slowed time in the works Ocean Without a Shore (2007), and
Raft (2004), is particularly effective in enabling observation of micro
changes in human expression. There is, however, an exaggeration of
emotion produced by this. In my video work I use representation of
slow time to allude to, rather than state or exaggerate moments of
thought or feeling. Time is varied at significant moments, working
with the rhythm of movement, rather than slowed for an entire work.
Visual representation of changes in time can produce differences in
the sense of time felt by the viewer. A sense of suspended or extended
time connects with my understanding of the moment of mortality
awareness, where time may be perceived as infinite. Bill Viola’s
conceptual interest in mortality, and the manipulation of time in his
works, inform my approach to video. I take a more low key approach
to content, evoking rather than proclaiming feeling, and alluding to
embodiment rather than using the human body directly.
Framing and Display

The framing of work is important in my practice as a strategy in exhibition installation. Attention to context in an exhibition space is integral in an artist's attempt to guide reception of the meaning of the work. In my area of my research practice I investigate the necessary qualities for the exhibition site for my artwork. In my sculptural work and in my video projections there are constructed and architectural qualities, that link to psychological qualities of architectural space and construction. The physical site where mortality can be contemplated may influence the content of contemplation through either alleviating or heightening anxiety.

In Warped Space architectural historian and theorist Anthony Vidler draws attention to the exposure of contemporary anxieties in built forms, both in public architecture and in art objects and installations. Space is described as a site for reflection on anxieties regarding the self and its place in the contemporary built environment. Vidler refers to contemporary accounts of the film 'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari' that describe the expressionistic style as evoking the disturbed psyche of the main character in a silent interaction with the lines, planes and shadows of the constructed set. The internal space of the film uses architectural design to convey anxieties, borrowing from and exaggerating the increasingly industrialised cityscape of the time.

Congruence or opposition can be set up between the expressive content of the moving image, and the setting for its presentation or framing. For the viewer their act of observation creates the particular work for them, in response to their particular perspective. Choices of presentation for an artist working with video will influence the viewer's reception of the work to some extent. There will be a difference in reception and interpretation of a work that is the intimate size of a phone screen, for example, as opposed to a wall size projection.

When my video toward stillness (2016), was projected in c3 gallery, the frame disappeared into the light and colour of the surrounding walls. The moving image is present without immediate boundaries, contained within the exhibition space, and tending toward transience. Most contemporary gallery spaces align with the 'white cube' as described by Brian O'Doherty, a white, empty, almost sacred space, devoted to the object separated from the quotidian world. The white cube resonates with my practice, allowing the essential content of the work to be expressed without intrusion, sympathetic to a contemplative attitude to content.

Daniel Crooks's exhibition Parabolic, (2017), at Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, is significant to my practice in both exploration


of time and perception, and mode of display. Four LCD screens, in vertical and horizontal orientation, are widely spaced on three walls of the darkened gallery. The initial impression on entering is of a large dark space with isolated points of illumination where the video is screened. Each luminous LCD screen then draws the viewer into a complex moving video-space of manipulated digital images. In the videos figures transition through slowing, accelerating, reversing and repetition of time, their bodily presence distorted by these transitions.

This arrangement of LCD screens sites the complexity of image and concept within the subdued and contemplative atmosphere of the gallery. The reduced content of the gallery ambience promotes attention to the screens and their content. The viewer is made aware of the size and orientation of the screens, and then to the intricate content. In a similar way I intend the site for my artwork, through sparse content and subdued lighting, to provide a contemplative mood.

Embodiment

My art practice and research has explored two-dimensional imagery, sculptural form and the moving image. When the content includes human form and embodiment I make allusion to this rather than using direct representation of the human subject. Knowing mortality, being consciously aware of one’s own eventual death, is intimately bound to a sense of one’s own physical presence. Apprehension of death and longing for meaningful resolution is embodied. Through abstract sensual form I intend to evoke response to a felt awareness of apprehension and yearning that is located through embodiment, although not in a particular individuality. There is more an understanding of mortality as the universal human condition. For example my video work exhibited at c3 Contemporary Gallery in 2016 is projected to be of an average human height, in an intimate environment where the viewer can be engaged in relationship with moving shapes that may mirror the body’s presence and movement.

Laura Marks discusses the capacity of film or video to evoke responses of non-visual senses through what she describes as “haptic visuality.” Marks describes watching a film by Shauna Beharry where close images of the silk and folds of a sari are experienced as "brushing the (image of) the fabric with the skin of my eyes, rather than looking at


Jennifer Fisher writes that the haptic, “comprising the tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses … renders the surfaces of the body porous, being perceived at once inside, on the skin’s surface, and in external space.”

My use of a flexible material, in this case paper, alludes to the body through its skin-like surface and its capacity to describe volumetric form. Form is suggested by line and fold as is present in drapery, as, for example, with curtains or classical statuary. In my video works I use a slowing of time when there is an imminent or completed touching of forms. In one example the image is of two moving sheets of paper, neutral in colour. Movement exists as a billowing out, creating sensual form. This is emphasised through slowing the video time-code. In this way I aim to expand the moment of attention, inviting the viewer to absorb a physical presence to the images of flowing and folded form. In her writings on the meanings in drapery, Gen Doy describes historical and contemporary understandings of drapery that allude to both presence and absence. “Drapery was not just a surface … Sometimes the words for skin and drapery are the same and the drapery could be perceived as a second skin.”

Briony Fer titles her commentary on Liz Rideal’s photo-booth explorations ‘The Pleasure of Cloth’. In this work, Rideal presents a grid of photographs taken in a photo-booth that feature images of falling cloth. Fer discusses a seductive nature of cloth in movement, or falling into a shape, that makes reference to intimacies of the body. Fer also makes the point that drapery is “... just material but it may also suggest the transient, the insubstantial or immaterial.”

In the moving images I use, the body is present as a gesture, in the evocative nature of folds as they flow, touch or cling. There is a sensual aspect to the movement and touch of the material in the video, most noticeably in an almost knowing, shown at Counihan Gallery in 2016. In its nature paper has both durability and fragility, an aura of eventual impermanence. In an almost knowing I used damp paper, which, being not as flexible as cloth, is positioned between rigid and flowing. This gives its movements both ease and awkwardness, qualities noticeable as I reflect on my passage through life. In the sculpture also exhibited at Counihan gallery, threshold, the material presence of paper is used to refer to a fragility of substance, present yet potentially disappearing.

69. Ibid. 126.
In my most recent video work I continue to use cloth in the image content, and paper as the projection screen. (Fig. 7.) The projection paper-screen drapes from the vertical wall to the floor, becoming a sculptural object, transient and fragile as skin. Video of moving cloth is projected on the paper curve. The paper is then transformed into a luminous object, between static sculpture and evanescent image.

Movement and Stillness

My video work features transition from movement to stillness. Through the slow pacing of the luminous figure of moving paper I aim to draw the viewer into these changes. This is a transition that is reminiscent of slow breathing and a held breath, a premonition of the final breath of mortality.

In her essay, 'You've got me under your spell: the entranced spectator', Maria Walsh discusses the film *Lasso*, by Finnish artist Salla Tykkä. Here Walsh describes a luminous appearance to the film that draws the viewer in to an entranced state. Walsh describes being immersed in the image content of this film through the film maker’s ability to maintain emotional identification while using abstracted gestures.73 In my video I intend the sensual nature of the filmed object, its folding and movement, to draw the viewer toward a transient moment where unresolvable contradictions of living and mortality are implied.

My video is projected in a quiet exhibition space, where the viewer may respond to the luminous pattern of slow movement and come to mirror this space with their own slowed breath and recognition of stillness, the slight movements of the contemplative embodied mind, in anticipation of the inevitable stilled breath.

Capacity for movement is inherent in the sculptural forms I make as the subject for video. (Fig. 8) This frame and paper panel construction is intended to move as vibrations are transmitted through the dowel poles. When built, arbitrary vibration from footsteps and movement of natural air currents cause only small movements in the paper. Further activation is generated by waving a piece of cardboard to create a breeze. The two paper panels move toward and away from each other in a sequence of touch and relinquishment. This sequence mirrors my concept, drawn from the methodology, of vibration between being in knowledge of mortality and retreating to the everyday.

In my practice I use a number of pre-existing engineering elements, such as micro-computers, electric motors, lights, 3D design software and 3D printing. These are combined with straightforward materials such as plywood, dowel and wire to craft objects and simple machines. (Fig. 9) These machine based objects, while not appearing in the resolved work of this PhD, are integral to material research.

Examples of kinetic art that relate to my practice are, Naum Gabo’s *Virtual kinetic volume* (1920), that uses the mathematics of classical physics to indicate virtual form through distortions of a rotating...
rod, and Len Lye's Grass (1965)\textsuperscript{75}, where metal stalks move in an asymmetric pattern that changes with continued motion. Kinetic art involves movement to express its inherent unique qualities or can be used to approach cultural, political or aesthetic concerns. Len Lye did not expect consistency in his kinetic work, "... for each sculpture he wanted some subtle differences to occur from one performance to the next - variation within a particular range."\textsuperscript{76} He appreciated form "... as something performed, something that involved a process."\textsuperscript{77} Lye had a consistent interest in that aspect of the physical structure of the brain that responded to basic attributes of the physical world, such as motion. For Lye kinetic art required a physical, emotional response, an empathic relationship between the observer and the qualities of the art-work that moved with apparent life.\textsuperscript{78}

Carsten Nicolai produces music under the pseudonym Alva Noto, as well as exploring audio-visual work in exhibition and installation.\textsuperscript{79} His use of machines is relevant to my practice, as in \textit{reflektor distortion} (2016). Here Nicolai uses water in a rotating bowl as a mirror for a static arrangement of linear lights. Sound vibrations, together with the bowl’s rotation, disrupt the water surface, producing constant change in the reflection of the lights.\textsuperscript{80}

In my practice materials and machines are incorporated into experimental constructions. Essential aspects are identified and explored with digital photography and video. My artwork, \textit{vibration machine} (Fig. 10.), is an experimental apparatus that uses rhythmic movements generated by the vibration of sound through matter. Sound impulses cause wires to shake and change position, each peak of vibration bringing about a slightly different arrangement of the wires. Variation is seen to occur as the consequence of pulses in intensity of sound vibration. Through the use of close photography with a digital video camera, I could isolate an essential image, that of wires moving in the light, from the apparatus producing the movement. This close focus reflects my methodology, where I identify a movement of vibration in a shifting awareness of mortality, and variation within the repetition of vibration.

During these experiments I became interested in developing a more finished machine-like object than originally conceived. This approach has potential for future research beyond the time-frame of this project.

\textsuperscript{76} Horrocks, \textit{Art That Moves}, 186.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. 91.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. 61.
The contemporary artist Laura Woodward creates complex kinetic works that she discovers to some extent through the capacities of her materials. Woodward remarks that "The material forces certain solutions, asserting its own translation of the final artwork. Through this methodology, the material maintains conviction, both functionally and aesthetically." In an interview with Kent Wilson for Hawthorn Town Hall Gallery, 2014, Woodward mentions a growing realised of an empathic response to movement, a human identification with non-human form. Woodward says "When something moves, we respond. ... The idea that our bodies might try to imagine ourselves into something so very different from us is fascinating." I have found in my practice that movement in the image or object invites and facilitates engagement. A relationship is created between the viewer's moving body and a moving object or screen image. When apparently still, human equilibrium is held through a balance of forces, and is not completely immobile. The mutual relationship of movement has links to theories of consciousness.

Alva Noë discusses a model of consciousness based on relationship, proposing that consciousness exists through the interrelationship of the individual's brain with their body and the external world. In other words, consciousness is not entirely within the brain. Noë contends that consciousness is "something that we do, actively, in our dynamic interaction with the world around us." Work in medical neuroscience demonstrates the constant feedback and adaptation between the brain and the external world. Norman Doige writes of neural plasticity, this being the capacity of the brain to re-establish alternative neuronal pathways to compensate for injury.


or lack, pathways developed through interaction with the physical environment. V.S. Ramachandran and Eric L. Altschuler discuss the use of a "mirror-box" in the relief of phantom limb pain and other neurological disorders. The authors conclude that "Instead of thinking of brain modules as hard-wired and autonomous, we should think of them as being in a state of dynamic equilibrium with each other and with the environment (including the body), with connections being constantly formed and re-formed in response to changing environmental needs." Oliver Sacks describes behavioural changes and adaptations made as a consequence of physical injury to the brain. Sacks writes about a painter who lost the ability to see colour. This event led to severe a depression and then gradual adaptation to changed perception and invigoration of the painter’s artwork. Artwork exists through the relationship of the individual artist with themselves and the external world. Constructions of sense continue to be made as the artwork forms a relationship with the viewer, building pathways of meaning.

86. Oliver Sacks, An Anthropologist on Mars, (Sydney: Picador, 1995) 1-38
Sound

The significance of sound has been an interest throughout my research. For Brandon LaBelle sound is relational, “it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating.”

Sound has a concrete or immersive quality that is immediate, situated in time, space and context. Sound exists in and because of time. It is ephemeral, existing in experience for the length of a sound, as a musical note or type of noise.

In order to be understood, sound, although experienced in the present, requires recognition of it's progression through time. In the listener's memory there is awareness of a sound that qualifies the next sonic experience. As in the experience of musical forms a future can be imagined as the listener anticipates a further sonic event, implied by the current sound. The listener responds to a flow rather than individual sounds. Understood in this way, sound relates to transience and mortality, where the final future sound is that of one's own death.

In Elastic Organum (2014), Michael Prior, uses carefully set motors together with ready made materials, to create an integration of the sonic and visual that is rhythmic and cyclical, unfolding through time. There is a sense that his machine like constructions are provisional and transient, the sound arising from everyday and ready made materials being both changeable and in rhythmic repetition. The artist uses live video of the movements of his sound producing machines. This video is played through projectors placed on the ground with the image falling on cardboard boxes. Prior assigns these pieces a temporary place in a continuum of works, describing them as “esoteric machines that have no purpose ... maybe they are prototypes.”

The work and writings of sound artists Felix Hess (2001) and Zimoun further indicate possibilities of sonic practice that include integration with the visual, repetition, machine-sound, and environmental sound. In Moving Sound Creatures (1987) Hess places a number of small machines on the gallery floor. These are light-weight constructions on wheels, with electronics that produce sounds. Through stereo microphones the machines listen for sounds that they then move toward. Hess describes the essential nature of these machines as their sensitivity, their capacity to respond and react to each other.

Zimoun uses mechanical sound producing constructions, often using

91. Hess, Felix Hess: light as air, 4.
92. Ibid, 33.
multiple electric motors, cardboard and wood, arranged in a unified exhibition space. There is an ordered visual simplicity to the work, which combined with mostly soft, repetitive percussive sound, draws the observer’s attention to connections of architectural context and the artwork.

The content of a sound is enriched through its associations with its source, the listener and the listening environment. According to Salomé Voegelin sound “necessitates an involved participation”.

Sound can bring the listener into consciousness of the present, ask for a commitment of time and attention to listen over duration. Through use of sound in a visually based artwork this attentive engagement may encourage the viewer/listener to perceive a presence through time.

Michel Chion discusses the effectiveness of audio content in the reading of a visual source. Chion asserts the capacity of an audio track to attribute meaning to the moving image. He describes this as, “the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression ... that this information or expression ... is already contained in the image itself.”

Sound adds meaning to, or influences perception of what is seen on screen. Different impressions can be given of a single action through the use of sound. When image and sound are played together it appears to be that sound more readily influences image perception rather than image content determining how a sound is understood.

Chion describes film where the emotive and narrative content of a sequence can be radically altered by different combinations of sound with the same images. Chion states, ”The consequence for film is that sound, much more than the image, can become an insidious means of affective and semantic manipulation.”

In my video work, anticipating stillness, (2016), at c3 Contemporary Art Space, I explore a bodily response to sound, through positioning small speakers overhead. Brandon LaBelle describes how the artist Bernhard Leitner investigates the body’s response to sound, where “Leitner’s Headscapes is a physiognomic and neurological space for creating spatial articulations through the movement of a purely sonic figure ...” In Leitner’s work the sound is played through speakers that are positioned to induce sensations of depth and movement. My sound work in anticipating stillness attempts a similar action, with changes in positioning and intensity of a sound creating changes in sound pressure and the impression of a moving sound source. The speakers are placed in a grid at one end of the exhibition space,

93. Salomé Voegelin, Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art, (New York: Continuum, 2010), xii
95. Chion, Audio-Vision, 34
96. LaBelle, “Other Architectures: Michael Brewster, Maryanne Amacher, and Bernhard Leitner” in Background Noise, 228
creating an area for listening and viewing. The changing location of sound within this area has a de-stabilising effect within an otherwise ordered space.

Silence

Sound is implied through its absence in my exhibition, *an apprehension of mortality*, at Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, in 2016. Silence is integral to perception of sound. Silence is the background to sound, and comes before and at the end of sound. Silence can be seen to mirror stillness and, similar to how absolute stillness is not found in materiality, absolute silence cannot be achieved. Silence is instead a changeable value recognised through its contrast to intensity of sound. Quiet sounds in the background to a featured sound may not initially be heard during a pause. As a pause continues, these softer, less obvious sounds appear louder and more noticeable. Internal, bodily sounds may be heard. In the absence of immediate intentional sound in the exhibition space, a silence is hopefully created that is gradually filled.

Various commentaries on the role of silence in sound art are surveyed in the text *Sound by Artists*, edited by Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (1990). Silence is recognised in work of the Italian Futurist Marinetti, who, in 1933, delineated silences within sound as part of a radio broadcast. As described by LaBelle, John Cage’s *4’33”*, which was first presented in 1952, brought everyday sound into a concert performance through active silence. In *4’33”* the performer’s silence turns attention to the audience, as witness to and participant in the cultural context of the concert, environmental sound, and the physicality of the listening act. Voegelin describes a contemporary practice in which silence enables the listener to become more consciously aware of themselves as an embodied participant in the sound.

Michel Chion describes a sense of unease in silence as referring to 'suspension'. This occurs when an expected sound is eliminated, leading to a sense of the mysterious and an unfocused foreboding, occurring without the spectator being conscious of a reason why. Although Chion is writing about sound film this effect can be felt in video projected without sound. The image without sound is empty of a particular expected focus, an orientation of meaning applying to site or environment. The image is not tethered to a frame of sound, existing instead within the arbitrary audio ambience that intrudes into a gallery space.

In the development of my video practice I found that intentional silence became an important factor in itself. As stated by Douglas Kahn "Silence can have as much presence as anything. It accepts all adjectives: it can be deafening, malleable; pauses can be pregnant."101 As my later video works are intended to play without sound in the exhibition space, there may be an initial experience of silence that mirrors the experience of subdued lighting and empty space. Over the duration of the video this silence may eventually metamorphose into multiple environmental sounds, infiltrating the contemplative space with reminders of day to day existence. In this way the viewer also listens, aware of the activity of material world, potentially finding themselves between the sounds of the everyday and the still silence of mortality.

Monochrome

Aesthetic characteristics of black and white photography inform my practice. It is relevant to my current project that a personal history of the black and white photographic image has surfaced. I was taught to use a camera in the late 1960s by my father, developing and printing black and white negatives in the home darkroom. Since that time I have maintained an interest in the evocative nature of the monochromatic image, using minimal or subdued colour when not photographing in black and white. A concentration on essentials, as is present in the aesthetic and content of monochrome, best serves my current art practice. At this stage of my life my father and mother have died, and my son is older than I was when first using a camera, and I am becoming more aware of my own mortality. The use of the photograph for documenting my art practice is both a practical tool and is attached to my personal history and awareness of transient existence.

Monochrome is claimed variously as a depiction, or object of, ambiguity. Monochrome can express or be without meaning, be an experience of the infinite, or be a material object that expresses only its materiality. In Monochromes from Malevich to the Present, the ambiguities of the monochrome are discussed. The use of a single colour has been given the meanings of melancholy, sorrow, spiritual

grace, the transcendence said to be inherent in Yves Klein Blue.\textsuperscript{102} Barbara Rose proposes a simultaneous depiction of materiality and movement toward the infinite in the Suprematist Paintings of Kasimir Malevich.\textsuperscript{103}

Rose also discusses the monochrome being used as an object, simply a thing, without referential or inherent meaning. This is noted in the black paintings of Ad Rheinhardt, where monochrome is described as a series of denials, that render the painting as an object, without meaning other than its existence. Rose says about Rheinhardt’s painting that, “It declares only its own presence and its physical material qualities.”\textsuperscript{104} However this declaration of a self-referential and self-sufficient object is itself challenged, according to Craig Staff, by some of Reinhardt’s own notes where Reinhardt refers to there being nothing in his paintings to take hold of apart from what is essence and the inconceivable. Staff notes that these comments allow for the possibility of a metaphysical reading of Reinhardt’s work.\textsuperscript{105}

In my video pieces I intend ambiguity of meaning to be integral to the work. Meaning can be ascribed to my videos in a similar way that meaning is imposed rather than being inherent in existence. Purpose and depth of meaning is attached to events in response to the needs and beliefs of individuals and societies. Through my use of a reduced tonal palette in videos and exhibition context my artwork invites the viewer to project meaning on image and movement, while being aware that this content may originate from themselves.

In my practice I use the exhibition context to frame and enhance content. I include a small number of works in exhibition to allow space for contemplative attention on each piece. My sculptural work, both as subject of video filming and in the sculpture itself, is open in form and light in mass. Form is fashioned or suggested by fragile materials, paper and dowel rods. Colour is subdued, and confined to grey, black and white. The open structure of the sculpture invites the framing architecture of the exhibition space to be interactive with the form as part of its meaning. In \textit{threshold} (2016), the gallery lighting is subdued, the planes and lines of the forms emerge in relation to the walls and edges of the space. (Fig. 11.) The suspended paper is a path and gateway through and into an emptiness alluded to by the empty space of the gallery, presaging the direction of mortal life toward the unknown quality of our own death.

In the monochromatic palette of black, white, and nuanced shades of grey there is reference to the void, nothingness, death and the end of consciousness. My video works \textit{anticipating stillness} shown at c3,
an almost knowing, and toward stillness, shown at Counihan Gallery, in 2016, use a structure similar to threshold as the subject of filming. The original video is of white paper and almost colourless dowel rods, with a neutral background. In reworking and presentation I endeavour to maintain neutrality of colour, in accord with a simplicity or reduction of form. My video an almost knowing using the drama of black and white contrast, while toward stillness (Fig. 12.), is the closest to a monochromatic unity, being either white or grey. Colour is reduced and change or contrast of form is shown through the stillness and movement of the central forms. The form or object is almost de-materialised, nuances of change and repetition are perceived through attention to the duration of the work. In this extended, contemplative action the viewer may respond to the rhythm in the video, to become aware of themselves in relation to their own contingency, as a transient being in a physical framework.
CONCLUSION

This research project aims to identify the moment when an individual is in apprehension of mortality, being in the anxious state where they may grasp awareness of life simultaneously with awareness of their own death. My dissertation has an underlying existential philosophical position, where ideas of a greater meaning to life are challenged by destructive and seemingly arbitrary physical and mental illness. This emerges in part from my working life as a nurse, a career where the practical exigencies of life and death are directly experienced. There is a strong human desire to find an explanation or theory, philosophical or spiritual, that explains or ameliorates the difficulties of existence. There is a desire for an explanation that may prove something greater than physical life and death.

Through inner reflection I attempt to fully recognise and come to terms with my own mortality. I identify characteristics of this contemplative state that form the methodology that guides my practice, comprising repetition, variation, duration, irresolution and yearning. I find repetition in a constant return to thoughts of mortality and in the thoughts themselves, reaching toward and returning from a tenuous grasp of mortality. Variation and duration exist as qualities of the moment of repetition, a moment that varies in cognitive and emotional content at each repetition, and may be experienced as brief or infinite in extent. Irresolution describes my perspective that there is no uncontested understanding of mortality apart from the facts of death and decay of the body, while yearning refers to a desire for certainty of knowledge in the face of death.

In art practice research I endeavour to discover the visual means that most essentially elicits the simultaneous, durational and emotive factors of the moment of comprehension of individual mortality. In my initial engagement with this intent I explored notions of transience, using light as an object and technique, and in the construction of provisional forms. The use of lighting may either clarify or dissolve form, light as an object in itself can hold an immaterial notion of existence. I used LEDs to create objects of light, and studio lighting in a staging of objects to draw out a sense of impermanence. The luminous and immaterial qualities of light continue as aspects of practice throughout my research. The term ‘provisional’ in this case signifies art work that is not yet fully resolved, that is continuing to work through the questions it contains, in content and technique. In my practice this understanding of the provisional in art serves as a mirror to human existence, that is, living in a continual working out of concerns deriving from experience, rather than arriving at a resolved or perfected state of being. Continued research leads me to integrate this understanding of the provisional into my research process so that the sense of an unresolved question of existence remains prominent in a more finished art statement.
An initial research technique of photographic documentation, both still and video, developed into the use of video as the primary medium for content. In response to the methodology of repetition and variation I envisage a space of vibration between being in the awareness of mortality, and being in the return to daily existence. A constructed sculpture of two opposing paper panels, supported by thin lengths of dowel, stands in for different aspects of this space. Wind force causes the paper panels to move toward and away from each other. The need to document this process led to use of digital video, which I found to be a productive method to frame and concentrate content. In a development from this I use digital processing to arrive at a resolved video file, in which the content of the methodology is carried by the moving image alone.

In my research practice I simplify material objects and reduce colour range and variation in order to concentrate on the essential nature of my subject. Through this I reduce information irrelevant to the work, bringing attention to an evocation of meaning closely linked to the image or object. In the two videos, *an almost knowing* and *toward stillness*, the subjects, moving paper sheets, are illuminated and isolated from context, appearing as mainly white forms against a black or grey-white background. There is a combination of both an ephemeral and a sensual aspect to materiality in the changing folds and slow movement of form. The transient nature of material existence is evoked through this double nature.

My artwork is a gesture toward meaning, an expression of my reach toward understanding. As I attempt to conceive of mortality, no received or experiential knowledge provides certainty. Apprehension of mortality is attempted in a moment of time that contains a constant forward reach to potential understanding and return to a starting point, that itself changes with time’s forward movement and duration. In the constant movement of being the moment of mortality may not be understood in its entirety except in a finality of death. Derived from this understanding, movement in itself is important in my art practice, being integral to the perception of both duration and stillness, a rhythmic repetition of being.

A significant point in my video research, is where two sheets of paper reach toward each other and cling together, only to separate again. This reach and fall conveys a sense of longing. In my methodology I identify a sense of yearning implicit in awareness of mortality, which arises from two sources. One is an unfulfilled wish for a definite and convincing explanation for human mortality, and the meaning to life that could be derived from this explanation. The other is a yearning for life that occurs when positioning oneself at the point where life is lost. In the conception of my video works the two paper panels signify awareness of life and awareness of mortality. These separate and opposed states of awareness touch and know each other for a moment, and then fall away again to their position of irresolution.
The artist Wolfgang Laib uses repetition of motifs in large scale installations that refer to ritual associated with understanding of life and death. A large number of repeated objects, such as small scale symbolic boats, or small piles of pigment, create a sense of a vast space of stillness and movement. Through presenting my video work surrounded by empty space I aim to position awareness of mortality in an extended scale of space and time.

In the kinetic works of Len Lye repeated movements correspond to a consistent energy at the basis of life. In the movement in my video work there is repetition, and also variation, a change or jolt in rhythm that draws attention to change or ending in the continuity of existence.

In Claire Morgan’s drawings and constructions mortality is presented as an aspect integral to being, where life and death are co-existent and inter-dependent. Her works indicate a raw physical reality of death through the use of taxidermied birds and other animals, while exhibiting a sensitivity toward her subject. Her use of light, and fine linear threads indicates the same sense of transience that inform my research, although I aim to avoid the literal associations with death evident in the taxidermied birds of Morgan’s practice.

Other artists I have considered, such as video artists Bill Viola and Brielle Hansen address mortality and transience with representation of the body, also with meaning and emotion expressed through gesture and the face. Viola often approaches these themes with reference to religious and mystical imagery. Brielle Hansen, while not directly dealing with mortality, works with the body and time in an installation, or architectural context. I have found in my research a simplified form, essentially the movements of paper in light, that evokes a transient mortality without specific attachment to clear cultural meaning or emotional definition. The use of a symbolic or abstracted image rather than representation of the body, or person indicates a universal and contemplative approach to mortality, rather than identifying with another’s life and story. In this way it is the viewer’s thoughts and experience regarding mortality that are prominent.

Bill Viola uses different scales of presentation in his video work to achieve intimate or overwhelming effect. Scale ranges from portrait size to covering a wall. In the projection of my video work I use a scale that is approachable yet maintains a distance from the viewer. This sense of nearness and distance corresponds to an awareness of mortality, that is always close in its inevitable nature, and distant in its inaccessibility to being fully known. My video work is projected in exhibition so that the subject is approximately the average human height or a little larger. My work, transience, is projected on a paper screen, attached to the wall by one end, at approximately average eye level, and falling in a curve to the floor, inviting the viewer to be engaged in the image while distanced by the fragility of the projection surface.
The ‘live’ aspects of video, which can include performance, immediate feedback and time shifting are present in the seminal work of Nam June Paik and continue in contemporary practice. My video works do not involve the viewer in their production, however I work with the notion that the way the viewer moves through the exhibition space is a participatory act. Visual perception at its origin is theorised as dependent on movement of the perceiver. Simon Ings (2007) records the necessity of movement to vision in the automatic saccade of the eye, internal in the human and produced by movements of the head in birds. A theory of perceptual consciousness is put forward by Alva Noë (2008) that states perception is known through movement. In my exhibition practice I place artwork to aid the viewer’s recognition of content through their movement or point of stillness through the exhibition space. In anticipating stillness at c3 Gallery, 2016, a grid of speakers overhead suggests an area for listening and viewing. In my exhibition, An apprehension of mortality, at Counihan Gallery in 2016, the sculpture threshold, was the initial work seen in the first gallery space. This led to the large projection, an almost knowing. From here was an entrance to the next gallery space, seating was provided just past the entrance. This seat invited the viewer to rest where there was a view across the length of the gallery to the video projection, toward stillness, at the other end of the room. Here the viewer was able to immerse themselves in the exhibition’s content of moving image, reflection and architecture.

Immersion in an artwork can be deepened by the length of time the viewer spends with the work. There is a double request in the work, toward stillness, for a length of time to be taken to view and contemplate. This request exists in the time-based nature of video, and in its monochromatic appearance. The monochrome works with notions of time, as stated by Barbara Rose, “Lacking color contrast and image-ground differentiations, monochrome art prioritizes minuscule distinctions of nuance ... it requires time to see.”

Together with time taken to see, is the time taken to hear. My research practice addresses the question of whether sound can contribute to the exhibition experience of apprehension of mortality. In the work vibration machine, 2015, I used the physical vibrations of sound pulses to move wires in accord with the methodology of repetition and variation. The sound pulse, and a underlying constant tone, is heard. A close-up video of the wires focuses on their movement. Further experiment with sound took place in the video projection installation, anticipating stillness, at c3 Gallery, 2016. In this a constant sound

moved between, overhead speakers, making a criss-crossing variation of sound location, intended to enhance the reception of movement in the projected image.

Sound is recognised through the moment by moment reception of sound waves traveling through space and forward through linear time. Internal rhythm and repetition induce a sense of movement. A constant sound or rhythm has similar characteristics to video with little or no movement, there is a sense of time passing despite lack of change, and a growing expectation as variation is anticipated. There is anticipation of change in response to the naturally occurring changes in sound in the environment. As research practice in video and modes of projection progressed I became aware of the significance in the absence of sound. Absence of sound in video presentation is noticeable as a break in a common expectation. Silence can be used as emphasis or to stretch the timing of a particular moment. In my exhibition, *an apprehension of mortality*, at Counihan Gallery, 2016, I used an intentional absence of sound. Prior to this exhibition I had begun to think that the burden of expression of mortality was most effectively presented through only the most essential expressions of meaning. My experience of imposed sound is that it calls too much attention to itself, potentially existing in its own right as a sufficient expression.

During my own contemplative reflection I have discovered that environmental sounds become increasingly present. The quiet space of a gallery has its own embodied sound that grows in presence during the contemplative moment when the video is appreciated. In the silence of my video projections is a significant absence of sound, presaging absence of the listening and viewing self in the final moment of mortality.

My practice based research identifies the visual means where mortality can be approached. An art gallery, selected as a quiet and subdued place for secular reflection, is an ideal site to evoke the intangible, simultaneous awareness of life and mortality, ephemeral in time and elusive to grasp. In positioning the intangible in material form and space, the temporary and fragile nature of individual mortality is evoked. Through reference to repetition, time, and a sense of longing, I invite an apprehension of mortality.
The Apprehension of Mortality

Chronology of Practice

2014 - 2017
ORIGINS

Research began in 2014 with investigation into aspects of the ephemeral, transient and provisional. I experimented with light, sound, temporary material structures, maquettes of potential exhibition spaces and the documentary and image making potential of photography. My early experience working with sets and lighting for theatre informed initial research.

As part of this research I exhibited *fugitive presence* at Spare Room, RMIT University School of Art Galleries in March 2014. (Fig 1.) This exhibition is a site-sensitive construction of unpainted wooden beams, a transparent plastic curtain, transparent acrylic sheet, speakers and amplifier, set in a small black room. The objects are lit by one spotlight on the wall and small lights attached to one low beam.

The light on bare pine timber focuses attention on the line and tension of the beams. Reflection and translucence in the plastic curtain suggests volumetric form. Light and transparency leads to de-materialisation of the object to line, reflection and shadow.

Sound is included in this construction. An exciter speaker, which produces sound through vibrating the material it is attached to, is attached to an acrylic sheet. In this way the construction is the source of sound. A conventional speaker cone is attached to a plywood sheet leaning against the wall. The sound file is processed from digital field recordings local to RMIT University. Sounds moves spatially between the two speakers. An environment is created where outdoor sound intrudes into a secluded space, where constructed form in dynamic tension, appears to be in transition to the immaterial.

Using largely unmodified materials, a minimum of fixing materials (such as screws or nails), and using the walls of the exhibition space as integral support, expresses an arrangement of form contingent on it’s surrounding frame, adequate in form and necessities of construction for the specific time and place yet requiring re-arrangement to exist at another site.
Fig. 1. *fugitive presence*, black painted room, plastic sheet, wood, acrylic sheet, exciter speaker, amplifier, LED lights, Spare Room, RMIT University School of Art Galleries, 2014.
During and after my exhibition *fugitive presence*, I experimented with a small model of an exhibition space using cardboard and paper, open at the front to allow viewing and documentation. This model, similar to a traditional 4th Wall theatre set, I termed a theatrette, as being similar to a maquette). (Fig 2.)

Several iterations were produced with variation in lighting, included objects and imagery on the walls. (Fig 3.) The work evolved through documentation, reflection, more re-iteration and further documentation and reflection.

Documentation is a necessary and useful aspect of art practice. The most accessible form of documentation I have found is the photograph, due to the ease of digital photography and subsequent display either on computer screen or as print.

The setting up process for photographic documentation led me to open out the theatrette walls into external space. This was originally to allow the camera access to different points of view. Further adjustments were made in response to the emerging forms. Space, light, shadow and fragmented form suggested an ephemeral and elusive content. The contained, formal space was broken open, exposing the construction elements of the theatre box to relationships with the surrounding space and building architecture. Plane, line and angle formed a stage for expressive potential within the larger area of the exhibition space.

Some images that originated as documents of this process became resolved works in themselves. (Fig. 4.)

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Fig. 2. *theatrette (1)* cardboard, paper, string & glue, 2014
Fig. 3. *theatrette* (2) cardboard, paper, clay, 2014
Fig. 4. *open theatrette*, cardboard, wood, LED lights, Gossard Project Space RMIT University, 2014.
Further experiment with light followed. A strip of LED lights was formed into shapes, with objects placed in the of light. (figs 5 & 6.) These two images show a small constructions of dowel, paper, copper wire and glue placed within different rings of light. These images led me to identify the prominent feature of the works as the insubstantial sheen and shimmer of reflected light that both isolates and de-materialises form.

Fig. 5. *light shape (1)*, LED strip, paper, wire, 2014.

Fig. 6. *light shape (2)*, LED strip, dowel, copper wire, glue, 2014.
Objects and their multiple meanings and interpretations are linked with and partially understood through their environment, existing within a context. Relationships between intentional art objects and the framework of the gallery, architectural maquette or other exhibition space, can be developed to reflect a sense of transient contingency, the relationship only briefly existing and dependant on context.

Self-contained structural forms were made that could stand by themselves, or be arranged in precarious positions in existing architectural spaces such as halls, doorways or window frames. These constructions are 'provisional', as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary to be, "arranged or existing for the present, possibly to be changed later."¹ The works are a step in process toward resolution rather than a permanent object, using available materials such as cardboard, paper, plywood and string, without further refinement. Their content is indication or potential rather than a final statement, malleable to alternative interpretation.

A sculptural form was made with straightforward materials, such as plywood and dowel, and straightforward methods of construction, such as using a drill and string. The object was constructed by allowing the pragmatics of my construction methods and the qualities of the material to influence form. A sculptural form was made where a balance of tension is contained in an inter-working of material and method, form evolving through practice. (Fig. 7.)

This work was taken apart then remade in different places in the studio space, for example, at a doorway or window to show the presence of contingent and precarious form within pre-existing spaces. (Figs. 8-9.)

The term 'provisional' can also describe an exhibition, which is by necessity the transient presence of an artwork in a particular site, that then makes way for the next object or event. The theatre set and play is provisional in a similar fashion. The empty space is transformed for the needs of the performance or exhibition, then returned to the original emptiness of the architecturally defined area. The exhibition or performance continues to exist separately, open to reconfiguration and review; as art objects, theatre props, documentation, catalogue, and in the memories of the viewer or audience. In working with the provisional, form is made without the intent of longevity or permanence. Time and embodiment are unfixed, material being and its dissolution are approached in a temporary contingency of immediate consciousness of need, subject to change and necessarily incomplete.

As my practice continues the value of a crafted and resolved quality in object and image has become more prominent in conveying the intent of my research. The provisional remains as an aspect of process and content, rather than the basis of research. In transience all form exists as a temporary coherence of parts in a flow of change. This changeable and time-limited nature of being calls attention to our human experience of mortality. The resolved object or image is a stage in the flow, or point in duration, that will eventually make way for the next stage of form, or for dissolution.
In early 2015 I entered the next stage of research with a period of internal reflection and questioning. I attempted to place myself imaginatively in situations where a sense of my own mortality would be present. I find it fairly easy to imagine the world without me, the people I know and the familiar environment continuing without my presence. It is more difficult to be aware that the internal reality of my consciousness, the self-awareness of sensation and the thoughts that question awareness, the capacity for imaginative projection, will vanish completely, without my knowledge that they have gone.

However, through continued contemplation of my own mortality I identified a moment when to fully apprehend my own death might be possible. This is a tenuous apprehension, that is close to slipping into incomprehension. Apprehension is present as foreboding, a destabilising sense of unease.

In this process of internal reflection I identify a switching of awareness. There is a yearning for certainty as the consequence of this unresolved moment. In my visual research I endeavour to discover the means to evoke this space and moment of switching awareness, to resolve contradiction through its portrayal. Holding contradictions at one point or time is a form of resolution or containment that keeps the qualities of opposition intact.

Initially this moment existed solely as a thought experiment, not localised in material form within physical space. Early characteristics of this conceptual space were, repetition of the movement toward grasping mortality, and variation within repetition. In the oscillating switching of attempted understanding change occurs with incremental shifts in intellectual and emotional knowledge, and changes in psychological perspective arrive through accretion of experience.

In following the methodology through instances of repetition, variation, duration, irresolution and yearning, the moment of apprehension of mortality evolves increasingly into form.
These thoughts were first materialised by considering repetition of objects and variation in their placement. (Fig. 10.)

This piece is a board painted with chalkboard paint, chalk lines are inscribed, spirals of black paper are placed in formal arrangement. In a short series of photographs the spirals are moved or taken away, the lines scuffed or obscured. The rolls of black paper, due to their handmade origin, contain both repetition of basic form and variation in execution and character. Reminiscent of scrolls, the rolls of paper allude to written or pictorial knowledge. The colour black can hold a number of personal and cultural references, being the void, or nothingness, fear of the dark night, or container of knowledge and potential. Use of black and white, or a limited tonal range, refers to the art practice of the Monochrome, ambiguously holding meaning or none.

Fig. 10. repetition/variation, plywood, chalkboard paint, chalk, paper, 2015.
TOWARD MOVEMENT

Repetition

The use of the scroll form was expanded using 3d software to develop virtual iterations of different ideas. The project began directly and intuitively in material form. It was then documented by the photograph, which was developed into a resolved image. The idea then progressed through translation and adaptation in the virtual space of computer aided drawing. A return to the resonance of material form followed.

I see this following mortality awareness viewed as a transition of consciousness from the material to the immaterial, with consequent return to the material world. The place and time of return exists as a new point of origin to reach for understanding.

Following my methodology of repetition and variation the imagery of paper scrolls is explored in 3D software. (Fig. 11.) An array of scrolls is formed with individual scrolls then falling through a frame. Wires create obstacles that randomly twist the fall and position of the pieces. This scene can potentially be animated to show the scrolls in circular transition, an endless loop of death and reconstitution. I envisage a slow, almost imperceptible movement.

This piece identifies a sense movement, possible virtually through animation, or as implied in the still image, as an integral aspect of the moment of mortality awareness. Movement exists in the vibration, or switching, between the two aspects of awareness, in life, or on the edge of death.

Fig. 11. passage/fall, 3D render, 2015.
Ever-present within apprehension of mortality a reaching out, toward and over a dark space. I designed a virtual exhibition space where an object of yearning performs itself. (Fig. 12.) Dark rectangles refer to gaps and spaces where the constructed world falls away to emptiness. The virtual exhibition space is itself suspended in nothingness. A text to enhances content, blocks of this text are repeated and arranged in a repetitious echo of the search for resolution.

beginning with the uncertain place to stand there may be
an intricate spacing of shadow and intent
standing at point of uncertain balance
a space to experience the fine arc between someplace
space, no space, to all contain
... and how the line contains ...
and no place

Bruce Dickson, 2015.

Fig. 12. arcSpace (I), 3D render, 2015.
This work continues my interest in the theatrical presence of objects that was present in work of 2014. The exhibition space or theatre is precariously suspended in emptiness. Within the stillness of this image I noticed an implied movement, where the space portrayed is caught in a moment of progression, with an unknown source and ending. This prompted me to consider virtual or real rather than implied movement to activate the image.

**From Animation to Video Projection**

Movement is investigated in *arcSpace(2)*. (Fig. 13. See Appendix: 01-arcSpace(2).mp4) Elements of the composition are separated and animated in a short video loop, with video of moving water replacing the floor and the surrounding walls removed. The text is animated to move slowly through the frame. This extends reference from gallery space, to a more spatially ambiguous combination of stillness and moving image. Movement and repetition are contained in an internal duration marked by progression within the potentially infinite loop.

![arcSpace(2), HD-video, 2015.](image)
I worked through iterations of this short animation/video, removing parts until all original objects were eliminated, leaving animated text and video of moving water in an irregular frame. I then explored video projection, including rear projection, on a variety of screen surfaces. (Fig. 14.)

Fig. 14. luminous, HD video, 2015.
I find inclusion of text in this primarily visual work to be counterproductive. In this experiment words are objects, significant through their visual presence as text as well as in their meaning. However, there is a resonance of authority in text that creates a visual primacy that can be privileged over other aspects of the image, despite the words containing uncertain meaning. I find even poetic text overly dominant. Words are here eliminated to privilege the evocative and ambiguous visual field.

I explored the expressive textural qualities of the projection surface as integral to the overall context, where projected light does not exist solely as a tool but as content in itself. The projected image is ephemeral by nature. The image is not materially present on the wall or screen, as on a printed or painted surface, but exists through the electro-mechanical process that is the visual light spectrum mediated through technology. The images are latent in a storage device, to be viewed in the intentional duration of projection. When the projection device is turned off, there is no image. The cone of projected light is itself evanescent, unseen without the material interruption of the projection screen. Considerations of screening technique, including surface, scale, ambient lighting, and using a separate screen or gallery wall, continue through my research practice.

The moving image can entrance the spectator through visions brought in from elsewhere, separated from their source, and out of tangible reach of the spectator. Alongside this ephemeral quality is the known material phenomena of projection, the implicit technology accepted and understood by the spectator, described by Catherine Elwes as being through “the human ability to suspend disbelief and entertain two realities simultaneously.” I intend the entrancement of a moving image to be simultaneous to cognitive appreciation of meaning and physical materiality, mutually dependent yet distinct.

The use of fabric and fold, demonstrated with a quality of luminescence as shown previously in Fig. 14, revisits my interest in light as object and metaphor and an intermittent use of fabric throughout my art practice. The sensual, bodily qualities of fabric or drapery is discussed elsewhere in this exegesis.

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2. Walsh, “You’ve got me under your spell: the entranced spectator.” In Trodd, Screen/Space, 111-125
3. Elwes, “Introduction”. In Installation and the Moving Image, 1-10
MATERIALISING REPETITION/VIBRATION

Toward Form

In mortality awareness there is an oscillation or vibration between two states of potential knowledge. I attempt to place my self, my consciousness, where death is, where there is no self or conception of self. As I attempt this I am inevitably drawn back to being fully situated within my consciousness as it I know it, within my individual material form. From here I again imagine the space, or non-space, where I attempt awareness of non-existence.

My experience of this oscillation is being in an uneasy moment, where opposites are entirely present simultaneously, without resolution to one or the other. This vibrational space of awareness is visually conceived as containing two planes, one of being with the world, and one of being with mortality, states both contrary and coexistent. Light emanates from or through the two planes, illuminating them as qualities emerging in space and duration. Between the two planes is line of transience, marking impermanent human presence.

This idea was developed as a sketch showing two panels or states of conscious awareness facing each other. (Fig. 15.)

From this sketch I developed a 3D model, processed and rendered in 3D imaging software. (Fig. 16.) In this image threads of consciousness are suspended between planes of awareness in an enveloping nothingness. This precursor image was too static and neat to fully express my understanding of the destabilising effects of knowing mortality. To be aware of one’s own mortality can be confronting, an emotionally fraught space of unknown potential.
Consciousness is embodied, existing in the material workings of neurophysiology and neurochemistry. Physical exigencies encompass the reality of confrontation with mortality. It may be that our understanding of consciousness is limited by the inability of conscious thought to be completely outside itself, separate from its physical location. I recognise an embodiment in bringing concept and virtual imaging into material form, translating an idea from concept to sketch, then computer aided imaging, and then to a physical object in the world.

Fig. 16. *vibration (1)*, 3D render, 2015.
Translation to Video

The material context of bringing an object into being constrains the object to some extent. The potential and limits of material influence how meaning is embedded or gestured toward. Through and in its material references the object, sound or image enacts its communicative presence.

My research practice to this point indicates a tendency toward constructions in concept development. Delicate and fragile structures are made, tenuous in attempting to grasp ambiguous and evasive concepts, and materially ephemeral or transient. Light can define and solidify an object through illumination and shadow, it can isolate and expose fine structures and movements. Wire, string and dowel have a minimal physical presence. Fabric and paper are malleable, changeable and fragile, with paper in particular referencing the fragility of skin.

Informed by these points I translated the virtual image into material form. (Fig. 17.) Moving between media can be a form of translation, nuances of meaning and expression can be both lost and gained, and tangential directions initiated. My vocabulary of translation uses dowel rods as a supporting frame, translucent tracing paper as the hanging planes, with knotted string as the central transient object, with illumination by spotlights.

Fig. 17. supporting frame, dowel, wood, paper, string, 2015.
The flexibility of the supporting frame allowed movement. This could be movement initiated by the viewer, other viewers in the same space or vibration through the floor. Loose hanging paper allowed movement with the frame through vibration or external force such as the movement of air.

The material presence of the frame invites a haptic response through recognition and mirroring of an average human height. The frame is present as an object in relationship with the viewer. The moving paper activates the work, inviting an embodied response in the perceiver. The visual can be enhanced through movement designed to be felt within the body. Jennifer Fisher discusses this is the way exhibitions can be understood through changing physical relationships to the works presented, perhaps most directly felt in three-dimensional work.  

Aspects of form discovered in photographic documentation prompted me to make changes to the structure. The flat plane of the camera frame highlighted intrusive visual complication, which was removed. Photographic documentation was extended through digital video, recording changes in form and light through movement of the frame and paper panels. On editing I found the video itself held much of my expressive intention. Concentration of the image through post processing highlighted visual relationships of reduced colour or monochrome and isolated those forms and relationships essential to evoke the movement of awareness.

These moving images inspired and extended investigations in movement and time. Time can be variable in relation to a subjective perception of experience. The dimensions of mortality awareness are flexible, instantaneous and of potential infinite duration. There is anticipation inherent in the moving image as the paper panels move part way toward each other, fall back and move to reach out again with the intention of creating a counter-movement of yearning to fully inhabit each breath.

The images opposite are iterations of research outcomes from video documentation. (Fig. 18.) Movement is produced in response to a breeze made by waving a piece of cardboard. The video frames are processed for contrast and light levels, then cropped.

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4. Jennifer Fisher, "Relational Sense", 4-11
Reading the images there is stasis, change, then return to stasis in a slightly varied form. There is an implied duration marked by a symmetry of stillness, disturbance and return. The movement implied in the centre image is read as an instant in a continuity of anticipation and relinquishment. The motivating force for the movement could be from an internal, or external source, both are simultaneously possible. The shapes are illuminated from within, their translucence an expression of insubstantial and de-materialised matter. There is a space opening between the shapes where vision falls into the density of black. Passage is disturbed, the stillness of the black void is disrupted by the movement of the shapes, and is then reasserted. In the middle image the two paper panels touch each other. While the paper is wet the two sheets of paper cling to each other. The paper is responsive to breeze, its movements echo breathing. The simultaneously sensuous and insubstantial shapes reference human embodiment in an arc of movement and variation in passage toward mortality.

Fig. 18. *anticipation*, cropped and processed video-frames, 2015.
A further video explored changes to the paper-panel frame and filming method. The images are taken from a sequence of video stills. (Figs. 19 & 20.) The filmed objects are as previously described with the string between the papers removed as unnecessary.

The sequence here demonstrates movement and stillness, moments in a continuum of time. The movement and the touch of the sheets of paper is the essential aspect of this video. Slight vibrations and movements in the paper shapes initiate a sense of anticipation, increasing with a stronger and more abrupt movement as the paper leaps across the image frame to touch and cling to the other paper panel. (See Appendix: 02-leap.mp4.)

The central material subject of my video is tracing paper, close to the qualities of skin in translucence and texture. Qualities inherent in this tracing paper are appropriate to my research project. Paper is fragile and is also a surface for inscription or erasure. When folded or draped, paper exhibits resistance, buckling or tearing. The tracing paper as used contains a sense of transience, a presence embodied yet impermanent. In this video the tracing paper is soaked with water to enhance its translucence and luminosity. During filming the paper dried, adding subtle changes to the flow of movement.

This video was originally processed without sound. To enhance the reading of the piece I added a simple pulsing sound played at low volume. This sound evokes a sense of forward movement, a continuous repetition that implies extension in time and space. Anticipation is built through the repetitive pulse, in sympathy with the trembling anticipatory movements on screen.

In using a subdued volume level the content can be easily overwhelmed by external noise. One exhibition space may favour underlying sound, it may be lost in another. To overcome this, headphones can be used, although they can be an intrusive element. Headphones may also give the viewer a sense of intimacy, and the choice to experience the artwork without sound.

The space of apprehension of mortality that I imagine is intimately individual but not secluded. Silence, a recognition of emptiness or nothingness, may be the position from where mortality is best regarded.
Vibration Machine

Alongside experiments with video I worked on a sculptural piece titled *vibration machine*. (Fig. 21) Thin wires are attached to springs connected to an exciter speaker (a speaker that induces vibration in the medium it is attached to create sound). An almost inaudible pulse plays, causing the wires to vibrate and shift position, not returning to the original configuration. The movement and rearrangement of the wires over time, in response to the pulse of sound, fulfils my methodology of duration, repetition, and variation. In close-up video of the wires, there is a concentrated audio-visual result that is an iteration of the oscillating arc between stillness and movement and stillness prominent in my other video.

A section of this video was processed and then projected on a white wall where it appeared to be a dark space recessed into the wall. (Fig. 22. See Appendix: 03-vibration(2).mp4.) In these last images the content is reduced to essentials, the movement of lines is distinct only in reflection of light. A repeated yet subtly varied response to mortality awareness takes place within a dark void, an appropriate place for unresolved inquiry into meaning.
Fig. 22. *vibration (2)*, HD video, 2015.
Further Iteration

In my next video three sections were composited to form interrelated sequences of movement and stasis. The 3 part structure allows for simultaneous presentation of different time-lines, enabling various relationships between three instances of mortality awareness to occur at different moments and in differing rhythms. These are presented within a potentially infinite loop.

The sequence reads as a transition of movement, touch, and a relinquishing to stillness. (Figs. 23-24) A desire to apprehend meaning disrupts a space that is almost still, then falls away without satisfaction.

The supporting frames for the paper sheets may not be essential to meaning. They do work in providing a structural context, preventing form from being too disconnected from the originating mortality awareness, which occurs embodied in consciousness.

With further editing this piece was exhibited at Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, July/August, 2016.
Fig. 24. 3-part (2), HD video, 2015.
Variations

In this project I used a suspended rectangle as structural support for the paper panels. A string holding one side of the rectangle was cut, allowing it to fall from left to right. (See Appendix: 04-fall.mp4.)

Two video frames show the suspended panels falling out of the image frame from right to left. (Figs. 25-26.) Through using white on white in diffuse available light the distinctions between figure and ground are diminished. Form is fugitive, clear only in a movement. The monochromatic appearance and de-materialisation of the image, barely visible in shades of grey and white, together with intimations of movement, came to inform further visual research.

In this sequence I was mindful of consciousness reaching out for awareness and collapsing from irresolution. Repetition finds an apparent ending through collapse and disappearance of form. The sequence is a statement of finality.
Investigation of video projection scale followed. Tests in the Gossard Project Space at RMIT University, confirmed that the videos kept internal coherence when projected to large scale. The paper-panels were scaled to an average human size.

Through content and scale an intimate relationship can be formed between the viewer and the artwork. It is felt as well as visually understood.

A video sequence, white paper on a black background, was projected on the white wall, with the room lights on. (Fig. 27) The background disappeared into the ambient light on the wall, leaving only the movement of the white paper visible. The white image then appears without internal supporting context, framed only by the exhibition space. The image is both present and ephemeral, expressing a moment of mortality awareness through variations in movement and stillness.

The video plays out in silence. Movement in silence has an anticipatory presence, presaging imminent mortality. Further research aimed to clarify whether sound will be integral or extraneous to essential expression of content.
Research through Exhibition: 2016

Two exhibitions during 2016 served as sites of research.

**c3 Contemporary Art Space: June/July 2016**

At c3 Gallery I found that through manipulation of light levels in the gallery space I found I could de-materialise the black video frame, as found in the space at RMIT University. The architectural environment of exhibition is part of the work, a containing frame for movement of elusive and unfixed white images. (Fig. 28. See Appendix: 05-anticipating_stillness_c3.mp4.)

For this exhibition I developed a new video sequence with application of the methodology of repetition and variation within duration. The basic sequence plays 3 times, with variation in speed of movement, and variation in which sequences of movement are repeated. The full sequence is a loop of a little over ten minutes. (See Appendix: 07-anticipating_stillness_origin.mp4.)

This exhibition included sound. A rhythmic pulse processed from field recordings was included. Constant rhythm can induce a sense of anticipation, to mirror the uncertain anticipatory space where mortality comes to awareness.

In the work for c3 sound and image are intended to be thematically similar and mutually supportive. The placement of speakers developed through attention to how the sound source is sited in the exhibition space. Bernhard Leitner writes of his research practice in sound and architecture, that, "Sound traveling between a multitude of loudspeakers describes and defines space." To evoke a sense of anticipation and disturbance a single channel sound moved between different positions in a grid overhead.

I constructed an overhead grid frame holding four small speakers, a single audio channel of hiss and crackle plays through these speakers. An electronic device switches between speakers. A rhythmic low sound comes from a white speaker placed on the floor. (Fig. 29.) Design and manufacture of the speaker array used 3D printing. Micro-computers and electronics were used in timing and distributing the sound.

The exhibition area at c3 is a small white-painted space. The scale of the video projection mirrors the average height of the viewer, promoting a bodily relationship between the image content and the observer. The projector is at the rear wall, not hidden yet high enough not to interfere with the integrity of the exhibition space. The closeness of the projector to the speaker frame integrates both into the structure of the art work.

By using the wall as projection screen, without an obvious video frame, the gallery environment is brought into the work. The image located as part of the everyday world. Allusion to the ambiguity of monochrome is present in the reduced palette, alternatively void or material substance. Ephemeral figures of awareness and irresolution move through a cycle of appearance and dissolution. A sense of longing is conveyed in the movement of the paper, evoked by the use of timing changes to emphasise a leap of movement and slow relinquishment of touch. There is allusion to passage, a window or door to knowledge of mortality. Living breath is also implied in the movement of the paper.

The switching of sound across the overhead frame provides spatial change and sense of movement. However at this point sound is not yet integrated with the visual.

Fig. 29. *anticipating stillness*, installation image, overhead frame - 3D printed speaker boxes, dowel, 2016.
Counihan Gallery: July/August 2016

This exhibition contains sculpture and video projection. The sculpture, *threshold*, is in the first room, near the entrance. (Fig. 30.) A sheet of paper, uniformly painted with India Ink, hangs from a black-painted dowel frame. The same paper, treated with black India Ink at one end, with the rest staying the original off-white colour, rests on the black gallery floor, draped over a floor-standing dowel frame. The sculpture is in subdued light. The form leads diagonally toward the video projection, *an almost knowing*, at the other end of the room.

On entering the exhibition space the sculpture is the first work to be seen. The hanging black sheet to the left, creates an impression of material substance rising up and falling back into shadow. In the paper on the floor there is a discontinuous rhythm, a break in the flow of experience. A transient materiality is found in the inherently fragile, thin wooden dowel and paper. This form is an adaptation of the structure that is the basis of the video work. The work is fragile and responsive to movement in the environment. Photographic documentation shows subtle movements of the sheets of paper in response to natural movement of air through the gallery.

The exhibition includes two video projections. One is a variant of the three part video, now titled *an almost knowing*. (Fig. 31.) The other video, *toward stillness*, (Fig. 32.), is developed from the white-on-white work, previously discussed. The videos are projected at opposing ends of two partially separated rooms. The projections are large scale, filling the end wall of each room. In this case subdued lighting enhances luminous qualities, while showing the video frame.

With this exhibition I explored absence of sound. There is a spacious moment that opens out when watching video without sound. The silent movement of my video sequence invites projection of content from visitors to the gallery. The large scale provides enough sensory information to occupy space and attention. The high ceiling and open space of the gallery induce a contemplative ambience, where
the ongoing murmurs of the external world become increasingly apparent as integral to the dual nature of mortality awareness, being both within life, and at its end.

Silent movement alludes to absent sonic rhythms and internally understood kinetic impulses. Michel Chion discusses expressions of sound and visual arrangement, that are not entirely visual or sonic, instead being absorbed through one sense and received or read through the haptic sense. The rhythm of movement in my video, working with repeated movements and changes in form, informs a bodily sense of duration, repetition and variation. The viewer is aware of their own breathing, their essential internal kinesis. There is implicit breath in the videos, as the paper and its supports bend and leap in response to a silent unseen force. In an almost knowing, this effect is marked by changes in time, slowing movement to allow the billowing out of the paper to be absorbed as a contemplative point of significance. In toward stillness, the reduced tonal range invites the viewer to appreciate more subtle movement. In both video works movement is never quite stilled, a perceptible vibration remains.

There is a cinematic aspect to the arrangement and scale of the video work as exhibited, in a darkened room with the wall filled with the projection. With non-narrative content, concentration on a specific transition of movement, and the repeated loop I intend to maintain a distance from the theatre movie. In discussing the cinema of Tsai Ming-Liang, Song Hwee Lim describes how stillness and silence are integral factors in creating an impression of slowness. Lim goes on to mention both Tsai and Andrei Tarkovsky as depicting time through the extended take. The sense of slow time is reinforced by minimal action occurring within the duration of the take. My moving images use a limited amount of repeated action framed by a stationary camera. Through slowing time in the video sequence I encourage the viewer to allow time and space for their own recognition of the moment of mortality that forms my intent.


Fig. 31. *an almost knowing*, HD video, installation, Counihan Gallery, 2016.
Fig. 32. *toward stillness*, HD video, installation, Counihan Gallery, 2016.
In the video *almost knowing*, there are three instances of the subject. The two on the left broke into strong movement at times, with sequences of touch and relinquishment being slowed to emphasise small moments of change not otherwise noticed. The instance to the right contained fewer and more subtle movements, inducing anticipation of expected change and highlighting the significance of stillness and slight gesture. (See Appendix: 07-*an almost knowing*. mp4.)

Passing into the next gallery room, the second video, *toward stillness*, is more contemplative. (See Appendix: 08-*toward stillness*.mp4.) A seat is positioned at one end of the hall, immediately past the entrance, inviting the viewer to sit and take the time to absorb the installation. Gallery staff noted that visitors would sit for extended periods in front of this work. Projected in large scale the video responds to the room, neither contradicting or emphasising the architecture of the space. The grey and white tonal field of the video creates ambiguity of positive and negative space, positioning the viewer in an oscillation between awareness of substance and nothingness.

The two videos in this exhibition are revised and relocated for the final exam exhibition for this PhD research, as they come closest to my aim to visually evoke a contemplative moment where human mortality can be held and recognised.
CULMINATION

Following the exhibition at Counihan Gallery, I explored the kinetic potential of electronics and machines, focusing on the meaning of movement as touched on in my video work up to this point.

The *turntable box* is my first iteration of this process. (Fig. 33.) The construction uses electronics, motors and wooden gears to turn a slow-moving turntable where lengths of dowel change relationship continually. The work is carefully designed and made. The parts were designed in 3D software and sent to commercial workshops for 3d printing or laser cutting. Micro-computers, electronics, motors, batteries and LED strips are the basis of light and movement. The box was then assembled and finished with wood stain. In my research process the care in design and crafting for an object, that may only be a precursor to another, resolved, work, reflects my understanding of the care spent in making a Buddhist Mandala, which is then swept away as symbol of life’s ephemeral nature and the inevitability of death.

I set up the *turntable box* to further explore movement and light in photography and video. Crumpled tracing paper was inserted between the rods and lit from one side. The slow turning brought a constant changing of light and shadow. Video documentation isolated the monochromatic effect of light and shade. (Fig. 34. See Appendix: 09-turntable_box.mp4.)

Fig. 33. *turntable box (1)*, plywood, dowel, electronic and mechanical components, 2016.
My practice research indicates that a primary use of projected video resolves my research questions, using an economy of means and poetics of expression. The precursors to video, being sculpture, construction, mechanical and electronic devices, are productive in themselves as kinetic art objects, and as subjects for video. Exploration of machine movement and video resulted in development of projection to a moving screen. A video made of the turntable box, with tracing paper inserts, is projected onto a screen curved from the wall to floor, with a movement device on the floor. (Fig. 35.)

Fig. 34. _turntable box (2)_ , box, dowel, tracing paper, 2016.

Fig. 35. _moving screen_ , movement device, paper, wood, string, video projection, 2017.
The moving screen uses a micro-computer, motor, and wood and hardware connections for the movement actuator. Cloth and paper are used for variations of the screen. Projection-mapping software is used to fit the image to the screen. The movement achieved at this initial stage is rudimentary and requires refinement.

The time of mortality awareness is a restless moment, where one is unable to accept explanation or consolation. In the structures used as subjects for video this is evoked through repeated movement embodying a yearning for resolution. In my recent practice refinement of the construct and image content is intended to embody a restless breathing.

For the next iteration of this form, I used a screen without movement, allowing attention to focus on the curve of connection between wall and floor. In *transience*, tracing paper is suspended between the wall and floor. The curve of the screen appears to float in a between horizontal and vertical planes, evoking both connection and transience. Projected light shines through the translucent paper to show the space below inhabited by the curving of the paper and the soft glow of light. (See Appendix: 10-*transience*.mp4.) Through mapped projection a video of a restless movement similar to breath or heartbeat floats on the translucent sweep of paper, a site both ephemeral and grounded in architectural connection to the room. (Fig. 36.)

The immersive effect of cinematic scale encourages the use of the wall in exhibition design. Limited tonal range allows a subtlety of expression and an invitation to the viewer to be quietly within the artwork, potentially allowing an absorption of the individual into the extended time and space of the video projection and its architectural surrounds.

In the progress of research my detailed and carefully constructed mechanical-electronic constructions have always found their place as part of the developmental process, with the current outcome being the projected moving image. Investigation of sound, while now expressed as silence, has been integral to the development of the final artworks. In further research and practice there is an opportunity develop my methodology through a combination of video, sound and kinetic objects. The work of Zimoun, referred to earlier in this dissertation, indicates a potential direction. Zimoun's sound making machines have a resolved presence within a synthesis of sound, object and exhibition architecture. A research practice of developing iterations of my mechanical-electronic constructions, can also involve sound production and presentation with video making and projection. Through this practice my vision of fragile and precarious existence can be further explored.
Fig. 36. *transience*, paper, HD video projection, 2017.
REFERENCES


CV

Solo Exhibitions:

*Anticipating Stillness*, c3 Contemporary Art Space. June 2016
*Uneasy Presence*, c3 Contemporary Art Space. September 2014
*Fugitive Presence*, Spare Room, School of Art Galleries, RMIT University. April 2014
*Enfolding*, Bower Gallery, Ripponlea. 2011

*Points of Transit*, Temple Studio. 1995

Group Exhibitions:

*Sub-Zero. Summer Salon*, Centre for Contemporary Photography. 1998
*Bird’s Eye View*, New Media Network Gallery. 1995
*Atlas*, New Media Network Gallery. 1995

Awards

Equal best in Exhibition; *Indulge*, Fringe Visual Arts. 1996

Education

Masters in Fine Art (coursework) RMIT University 2013
Masters in Art Therapy. La Trobe University 2000
BA Fine Art (Printmaking/Sculpture). RMIT 1992

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Appendix: Video-Audio

1. arcSpace(2).mp4 - 2mon, 1080p, video only.
2. leap.mp4 - 45sec, 1080p, video-audio.
3. vibration(2).mp4 - 26sec, 1080p, video-audio.
4. fall.mp4 - 1min25sec, 1080p, video only.
5. anticipating_stillness_c3.mp4 - 41sec, 720p, video-audio, installation document.
6. anticipating_stillness_origin.mp4 - 10min10sec, 1080p, video-audio, video for projection.
7. an_almost_knowing.mp4 - 7min30sec, 1080p, video only, video for projection.
8. toward_stillness.mp4 - 4min01sec, 1080p, video only, video for projection.
9. turntable_box.mp4 - 40sec, 1080p, video-audio.
10. transience.mp4 - 28sec, 1080p, video only.

(available at www.brucedickson-artist.com/appended-video.html)