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Merging theory and practice: Examining the psychoanalytic self through a creative practice

Abstract

This paper outlines the merging of both creative and theoretical research – or praxis – in conjunction with the application of reflexivity, as a methodological and investigative approach with the outcome of visual creative work. Integrating the philosophical ideas of cultural theorist Slavoj Zizek, and the creative work of artists Bill Viola and Patricia Piccinini, as a base from which to explore the notion of the reality of Self as a transient and mediated state, the researcher's own creative practice is extensively interrogated as an example of praxis in practice.

Key words: Praxis, Reflexivity, Self, Reality, Transience, Visual art

This paper aims to outline the merging of both creative and theoretical research – or praxis – in conjunction with the application of reflexivity, as a methodological and investigative approach with the outcome of visual creative work. Praxis can be defined as the integration of both theoretical notions and creative research and is a term derived from the writings of Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci. In his 'philosophy of praxis', the term can be described as "the unification of critical theory and revolutionary practice" (Oliga 1996, 217). Praxis in this sense can be viewed as a means by which the researcher can adopt processes that are both sensitive to, incorporate, and impact the broader social realm. Or as Christopher Crouch explains: "When the creative practitioner adopts praxis, it encourages the act of reflecting upon, and reconstructing the constructed world. Adopting praxis assumes a process of meaning making, and that meaning and its processes are contingent upon a cultural and social environment" (2007, 113).

While there is built into every methodology a clear and structured framework within which to develop research, it has been my experience that a more flexible research method is appropriate to the process of making visual art. Indeed, I have found it difficult to locate a space in which the act of making can exist within the rigours of interrogative academic research. My aim is to demonstrate how, with reference to my own creative research, a reflexive praxis may allow for this flexibility. I am not arguing for the privileging of theory over creative practice, or of using theoretical ideas to prescribe a creative outcome. Nor am I arguing for a formulaic methodological approach that outlines how to make a creative work.

Rather, with the aim of combining the research functions of the process-driven making of creative work, I am investigating how reflexive praxis may assume the potential of an integrative practice. Investigative practices of theoretical research may support the communicative purpose of visual art.

The issues this paper will address are threefold. Firstly, it will define and investigate praxis and reflexivity as a working methodological approach within the context of creative art. Secondly, it will investigate creative work within the dual parameters of process and exhibition. Finally, it will explore the use of reflexive praxis within the context of my own research of the psychoanalytic self as a mediated and transient state. The latter includes reference to the gap, or liminal space apparent between the psychoanalytic states of self as outlined by the cultural theorist and Lacanian psychoanalyst Slavoj Zizek.

I cannot separate my theoretical research and the communicative aims of my creative work from the process of making creative work. My creative practice uses predominantly installation, drawing, video, and projection to visually articulate and inform my research aims. Broadly speaking, these are located in the area of the psychoanalytic self, in which the self is positioned as ambiguous, constructed, and constantly mediated by that which lies outside itself. In a psychoanalytic sense, this notion of mediation is articulated by Zizek as 'extimacy', or the intimate made external (Myers, 2003, 41). Zizek's thesis is based in the Lacanian 'mirror stage' of human psychoanalytic development, in which the self becomes fully aware of its individual separateness from others and the world at large. This is when the self recognises its own image in its reflection, resulting in the sense that, as Lacan suggests: "We are…perpetually beside ourselves" (Belsey, 2005, 62). At this point, a gap of loss and the unconscious desire to reclaim it is created within the self as well as between the self and the world around it. The 'it' that the self has lost and through which the gap appears is the part of the self that is beyond conscious reasoning, beyond language. It is 'the real', or the world before it has been sliced up by language (Myers, 2003, 45). It is the psychoanalytic terrain of this gap that my research investigates.

I have found it difficult to locate a structured investigative framework that leaves room for research based in the ambiguous. In my view, reflexive praxis provides this space. Although it has been a complex task in finding this clarity, in my research, reflexivity is a vital component of the methodology of praxis. Creative work is intensely subjective, as it is the creative interpretation of the world as it is experienced by the artist. Yet it could be argued that the same could be said for any other interpretation of the world, including any theoretical position. Any interpretation is irrevocably mediated by the world from which it has evolved. By employing the use of reflexivity, the researcher may monitor their own subjectivities as they are determined (or mediated) by the social constructs of their world. In this sense,

reflexivity allows the researcher to "explicitly position themselves in relation to their objects of study so that one may assess researchers' knowledge claims in terms of situated aspects of their social selves and reveal their (often hidden) doxic values and assumptions" (Maton, 2003, 64). In this way, the researcher/practitioner is able to track their own mediation within the social field and thus their own potential biases, in order to recognise how those limitations might influence their assessments" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002: 222 in Crouch, 2007, 110).

Criticism of reflexivity as intrinsic to social models of research suggests it to often be undertheorised (Maton, 2003, 64). In terms of the inherent subjectivity and practicality of creative practice and the possibility of 'narrative research' (Crouch, 2007), validating analysis may also be problematic (Clabdinin & Connelly 2000; Stone 1993, cited in Crouch, 2007, 107). However, the rationale of these arguments loses merit if a theoretical analysis of both the researcher as subject within their field of practice as well as the subject of the research is addressed. Reflexively analysing the researcher as subject within his/her specific field of practice has been contextualised by Pierre Bourdieu, whose approach points out that:

> Each actor is relationally positioned within a field, this position determining his or her situated viewpoint of the activities of this and other fields. Thus, each actor has only a partial view of the game, acting accordingly. (cited in Maton, 2003, 58)

Pels (2000) acknowledges this gap, suggesting that "all observations have their blind spot, and remain to some extent naïve with respect to their own point of departure" (2000, 17), indicating that the influence and interpretation of the broader social field act as a distribution point from which individual reflexivity must eventually be released.

Zizek has also identified 'gaps' inherent in the reflexive self. As Zizek (2006) suggests, no one individual can stand completely away from themselves, as they are part of a larger whole that includes, informs and is inseparable from who they are. Therefore no one individual can be a truly objective observer: "It is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my 'material existence'" (2006, p. 17). In defining materialism in relation to reflexivity, Zizek writes: "Materialism means that the reality I see is never 'whole' – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it" (2006, 17). Thus, in terms of the psychoanalytic self, our own subjectivity is an unavoidable part of the human condition, and our inability to make visible or recognise the parts of ourselves that are contained within this subjectivity, proof of our own reality.

In terms of reflexive praxis, the question as to whether it is possible to become a fully objective researcher, and thus provide fully objective research, is dismantled by the researcher's implicit inclusion within the interpretation, or 'reading' of not only the subject of their research, but their position as a subject within it. This suggestion is of particular relevance to the process of making creative work, which depends on the subjective response of the practitioner/researcher. A reflexive approach to research demands a level of self awareness, or 'self actualisation' (Giddens, 1991, 4) that incorporates a seemingly infinite number of mediated variables. Therefore, it is possible that as a result of attempting to identify and acknowledge these variables, the researcher's reflexive engagement assumes an endless, circulatory aspect, in which their work becomes "chronically sidetracked to attend to their own conditions of possibility" (Pels, 2000, 17-18). However, Pels counteracts this inevitability by opening up the research enquiry into a broader field in which "[r]eflexivity is also something we must delegate to our friends, or rather: to our best enemies" (2000, 17-18). This suggests that we can only be reflexive to a point, beyond which we must open our research and our role as researcher to the community or social field around us. Indeed, in terms of making visual art to be publicly exhibited, it is perhaps imperative in a reflexively driven praxis to do so.

Crouch (2007) positions the role of the researcher and of the use of a reflexive praxis as a research model in the broader social (institutional) field as a means of negating the possibility of narcissism in the researcher. The practical application of the creative arts, coupled with the reflexive engagement of the researcher in both their personal and wider, cultural influences, alleviates the possibility of narcissism as it "forces individual engagement with institutional values, for as Freire [Freire 1972: 68] observes (in Crouch, 2007, 113), praxis takes place in the real world. In critiquing Bourdieu's position on reflexivity, Loic Wacquant agrees with this assertion, suggesting that: "For Bourdieu, reflexivity…uncover[s] the social at the heart of the individual, the impersonal beneath the intimate, the universal buried deep within the most particular" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 46). As such, the individual researcher/practitioner is inextricably connected within a broader social arc, in which personal revelations cannot be separated from the whole.

This position can be applied to the use of praxis within the creative field. Crouch (2007, 113) argues that: "Praxis encourages a move away from the pitfalls of introspective narcissism and towards an analytical engagement with human interaction, and emphasises the necessity to clarify the inter-subjective circumstances of the communicative act". The inter-subjective circumstances that Crouch discusses are, in my view, made apparent in two key ways. Firstly, through the inter-subjective communication between the creative work and a broader audience through public exhibition. Secondly, via the act of multidisciplinary research, in

which theoretical investigations, creative processes and the interrogation of works by previous artists ideas inform and support the practitioner/researcher's own. These coalesce to support the creative outcome. To expand on these ideas I now reflexively analyse my own position as a researcher/practitioner within the reflexive praxis model.

Creative practice in relation to reflexive praxis: A reflexive analysis of reflexive praxis

Unlike a semiotic or purely language-based critical platform, reflexive praxis includes the practice of making and the visual articulation of ideas as a vital component of research. The process of making creative work, or 'doing', is built into the foundation of reflexive praxis' function as a research methodology. For me, this distinction has been imperative in working within the reflexive praxis model. However, in negotiating the complexities of creative research within this model, I have found it necessary to clarify some loose parameters in which this 'doing' is based, and determine how reflexive praxis supports the process-based creative component of praxis-led research. These parameters include the communicative function of the public exhibition of creative work, and the introspective process of making the creative work.

Visual work is made to communicate and be seen by others, yet it is often a result of something much less tangible. The subjective, introspective notion of intuition denotes that which lies outside conscious reasoning. Therefore, if one were to locate the intuitive within the realm of the unconscious, its definition is hampered by that which is, by its own nature, unknowable. To reflexively analyse one's own intuition is therefore problematic. Arguably, in creative practice, unless room is given to the intuitive, to 'unconscious' visual exploration within reflexive praxis, the possibility of the creative outcome reflecting a prescriptive visual articulation of philosophical or psychoanalytic theory is high. This is not the aim of reflexive praxis in terms of my own theoretical and creative research into the psychoanalytic self. I do not assume that there is any easy negotiation between the demands inherent in the process of making and the rigours of theoretical examination and public exhibition. Nor am I suggesting that creative practice is based soley in intuitive response. Given the responsibilities of reflexivity as imperative within the reflexive praxis model and the arguable potential for narcissism inherent in subjective-based work, it is perhaps beneficial that it is not. In this respect, within the reflexive praxis methodology it is perhaps important to reflect on the role of the subjective, which includes the intuitive.

In reflexive praxis, whilst theory and making have equal footing in the overall research methodology, is not to assume that theoretical research and creative research are binary opposites, delineated into objective versus subjective polarities. The role of reflexive praxis is

an integrative application of the two. As Elliot Eisner writes: "Since what we know about the world is a product of the transaction of our subjective life *and* a postulated objective world, these worlds cannot be separated" (cited in Sullivan, 2010, 40). This view imbues the broader social field that reflexivity demands with the choices the practitioner makes during the process of making and the exhibition of the work (Crouch, 2007, 113). With particular reference to the practice-led research component of reflexive praxis, the notion of inter-subjectivity, or the merging of the objective and the subjective acknowledges the complexity of producing creative work. Within this idea there is space, perhaps, for "…possibilities whereby plural views, ambiguous notions, and uncertain outcomes become opportunities to see things differently" (Sullivan, 2010, 40). Certainly, this view is analogous to my area of research which explores similarly ambiguous terrain. In locating the gap, or the liminal space between theoretical and creative research as well as between the objective and subjective worlds of the creative practitioner, I can recognise an inter-subjective parallel present within the psychoanalytic self: the interior and the exterior, the inside and the outside, the intimate and the external.

It is my view that creative practice is as equally an intuitive practice as it is a communicative act. While I stress that these two things are by no means mutually exclusive, I have found it has been beneficial for my creative research to make this distinction. In terms of exhibiting creative work for public exhibition, choices need to made by the researcher/practitioner that are determined by several external factors, one of which includes the site of the space or gallery in which the work will be viewed, and how it can change how the work communicates. In so far as the intuitive or subjective component of my creative process it is, perhaps, "…the spaces in between that capture the realities encountered by research practitioners" (Sullivan, 2010, 39). I will extrapolate on the relevance of these decisions to my own work in the following case study. I aim to show that it is the external demands from which these decisions are determined that separate it, to some extent, from the interior process of making work.

Praxis in Practice: A Case Study

While my creative work began as an internal response to my own unformed psychoanalytic interests, it has been in the ongoing creative process in conjunction with the theoretical research that I have found a way in which to tease them out. If the outcome of creative work is ultimately viewed as a communicative act, it is imperative to locate an understanding of one's own work in order to determine what the work is attempting to articulate. Theoretical research has given me a tangible framework in which to ground ideas that are based in the

ambiguous. In locating an apparent universality inherent within notions of the psychoanalytic self, my work becomes less about my own sense of self as it does about the psychological notion of being—the mediated self as intrinsic to the human condition. The research then informs the decisions I make regarding installation and exhibition that enhance the communicative possibilities of the work to a broader audience.

In attempting to demonstrate the use of 'praxis in practice' using my own creative and theoretical research as a case study, it is therefore difficult to separate where one begins and the other ends. In a reflexive praxis, theory and practice are intertwined, each indelibly informing the other to such a degree that critically analysing my own creative work without the theoretical element that is imbued within it, is moot. In my view, the efficacy of reflexive praxis—defined by the merging of theory and practice—lies in the impossibility of doing so. While this perhaps implies that any reading of the visual work is somehow 'incorrect' without an implicit understanding of its theoretical element, this is not the case. What reflexive praxis offers is a tool through which the practitioner can interrogate, expand and develop their creative work, pushing it forward in a continual trajectory. By exposing the result of their inter-subjective creative work to the broader social field—the audience—in the form of a reflexively considered public exhibition, the researcher is allowing multiple readings of the creative outcome to be assessed or experienced by its observer. A reading of the work that differs from its intention must not be considered a failure. If it is communicating something to a viewer, if it evokes an experience in the viewer, if it demands the viewer to negotiate its purpose, it could be considered a success. The fact that it is even considered in diverse ways is the intention. In asking an audience to make this consideration, it is imperative to be considerate in my own creative investigation. Arguably, without a reflexive analysis of each work, and the relentless investigation of ideas both creative and theoretical, there is the possibility of stagnation in the creative outcome. Without progression and communicative intent in the form of subsequently process-led creative research and the public exhibition of the creative result, it is possible that there will be nothing for the audience to consider.

With reference to my own reflexive praxis, my interest in the psychoanalytic, mediated self arose when I started to explore the notion of the self as comprised of dual states: the mind and the body. As my creative work progressed, I found that my interest in exploring these ideas in three dimensional, sculptural form shifted to the use of projected video. This change in practice was an intuitive one and it was in my reflexive analysis that I began to make sense of why. My practice was beginning to reveal to me that the intangibility of the filmic body, recognisable yet ultimately illusory, corresponded to the more complex notion of self as transient and shifting. I became aware of the blurring of the boundaries between mind and body, and of the gap or space in between which the self is in constant flux. I cannot

differentiate whether this awareness stemmed directly from the theoretical component of my research, or from my creative investigations. In keeping with the integrative nature of reflexive praxis, this is perhaps appropriate. As the notion of the self grew more ambiguous, I began to search for outside sources from which I could tease out these increasingly complex ideas and enable my research to move forward. Coming from a psychoanalytic position, I contend that the writings of Slavoj Zizek continue to be an appropriate choice in which to establish a definition of self, as it is from a similar position that I will be basing my creative work. Zizek's theories are grounded in his apparently diverse and perhaps contradictory, dual positions of both Marxist and psychoanalyst. In this apparent dualism I am able to locate a theoretical framework based on ideas that are as elusive and malleable as the notion of the transient self that they attempt to interrogate. Due to the complexity of Zizek's ideas, it is unsurprising that locating definitions of the ideas within Zizek's own writings has been virtually impossible. For the sake of clarity, I have defined the key terms as espoused by Tony Myers (2003).

In a re-reading of Cartesian duality, Zizek maintains that people are constructed in two parts—the 'subject' and the 'self' (Myers, 2003, 45). In Zizek's reading, the subject is a void: static, unchangeable and a part of the meaningless 'real'. This is a term that describes the indescribable, in which he positions the physical body. The self, on the other hand, is mutable and open to regular modifications, located in what he terms the 'symbolic order', the superego of culture in which the world is categorised and subsequently, in which meaning is found (Myers, 2003, 45). It is the self that enables us to filter the elements of the symbolic order in an individual way, and thus negotiate the world with some level of mediated choice. However, the tension between the subject and the self arguably remain: the subject (which, in Zizek's terminology refers to the physical body), is an undeniable part of the real—of nature. We cannot exist without our bodies. Yet we are not only our bodies. We are also symbolic subjects—the self. It is within the symbolic order, defined by language that we are able to relate to our bodies at all. Indeed, Zizek (in Myers, 2003, 43) suggests that rather than a total duality between the self and the subject, there exists a transience, or a gap, in which each state of self shifts backwards and forwards, one informing the other.

In terms of my creative practice I realised that, as with Zizek's (2006) notion of the self as indefinite and malleable, the process involved in making creative work must reflect this *lack* of clarity, this *in*distinction. I resolved to retain the use of video that I had begun to incorporate into my practice intuitively, as I felt it best expressed my ideas on the ephemerality of self. After many years, I introduced drawing into my creative process, simultaneously realising that the reason was that I was in conflict about how the tangible or

physical body could be integrated into my creative investigation. The act of drawing, in which the body is viscerally involved in the process of making, is a more tangible physical act than using the digital technologies of video. There is a distance between the physical body and the creative act when capturing the world from behind a camera. In a practice that is exploring the ambiguities present within the self, with particular reference to the analogous mind/body relationship, the act of drawing made the complexity of this relationship apparent. My decision to create an animated projected video clearly resonated with this realisation.

In the animation method I employed, I drew directly onto printed video stills, allowing the work to retain both body (evidenced in the mark-making of the drawing), and mind (evidenced in the moving image of the body in the video). As a result, both my own physical body and the filmic body coalesce. My use of reflexive praxis (in which the intuitive desire to draw was integrated, and became paramount to the conceptual aims of my research), enabled me to identify an additional layer to the notion of the self as a transient and overlapping state, the result of which is made visually apparent in the creative outcome. Conceptually, it is the animation of the 'real' that interests me in this process. In the resulting work, *Dis/Integrate* (2008), the animated video (Figure 1.1) was projected opposite the real footage (Figure 1.2), which was displayed on a small monitor. In this work, I was exploring these questions of the transience of self by asking whether the animated 'version' of the body was any less or more mediated than the body represented in the 'real' footage.

Dis/Integrate (2008) comprised of two video works shown at Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge, Perth, Western Australia. An awkward and small room at the top of a narrow set of stairs, the space determined an immediate intimacy, a closeness that began to dictate the communicative function of the installation. I installed one small, recessed screen on the wall opposite the doorway at about eye-level, from which the 'real' footage was played. This was the first video work the viewer encountered upon entering the space. This acted as a focal point in which the viewer could be drawn into the installation and from which they could then navigate the darkness around them. The animation, undetectable to the viewer until they had fully entered the space, was projected on a much larger scale opposite the small screen. The immersive, almost disorienting effect of the small, pitch black room, coupled with the scale of the projected animation, succeeded in merging the shadow cast by the viewer's body over the projected image. It thus became an inadvertent part of the work. It also, perhaps allowed for ideas regarding the viewer's position to somehow be complicit in the mediation of the projected body, while concurrently calling into question their own mediation—their own extimacy. The experiential space, as a space consciously created by the artist to have an immersive effect on the viewer, could thus be viewed as highly mediated.

Dis/Integrate (2008) as well as any other creative work aiming for an experiential outcome, may be positioned as responses to this mediation. In an experiential space, the viewer becomes a part of the space in the sense that they are enveloped in a specific frame of reference or mood suggested by the creative work. They thus become a part of the work. Yet, as an objective viewer, they are simultaneously positioned as an observer of it. In my creative research, I aim to create experiential spaces that position the viewer in an immersive environment, focusing on creating the state of extimacy described in the writings of Zizek. When immersed in this space and as they negotiate the space between their own body and the filmic body it is my aim that the viewer's experience becomes a replication of the transitional or transient state of self that my work explores. That is, the work may exist in a highly mediated space, yet the viewer's response to the work is their own. As Judson (1995, 30) writes of the experiential installations of Bill Viola:

> Anyone entering one of Viola's installation spaces will encounter more or less the same visual and auditory environment as anyone else, orchestrated, of course, by the artist. Yet the actual experience of one of these works is as if the revelatory moment of extended duration, so characteristic of Viola's installations, had been one's own.

Whether this positions the viewer's experience of the work as deeply personal or, conversely, as deeply mediated (or perhaps more tellingly, as both), is arguable. In terms of reflexive praxis, the immersive nature of experiential installations may reveal the inter-subjective communicative capacity of creative work.

 In *Dis/Integrate* (2008), the placement and size discrepancies of screen and projection creates a dialogue between each work that talk about notions of intimacy or, in Zizekian terminology, extimacy—the intimate as mediated by the external (Myers 2003, 41-45). The small screen calls for close inspection, yet the monitor acts as a type of 'barrier' between viewer and image; the viewer may look at the work as one would a television image. The interaction between viewer and image is one-way, in so far as the viewer may experience the work in a voyeuristic sense. Yet they remain relatively disconnected from its content, which in itself could be read as a type of surveillance, as the camera follows the person endlessly around a darkened space. This experience may be linked to Kate Mondloch's (2007) model of 'double spatial dynamics'. This model will be explored in more detail later in the paper, although it can be broadly described as the experience in which the viewer becomes neither here nor there, but rather dislocated from both the reality of the screen and reality per se.

However the large, projected animation, while monumental in size and therefore perhaps a denial of the intimate, may be ironically read as more intimate than the small screen. It

demands of the viewer a greater level of physical interaction such as the experience of standing in front of a huge painting. The projected image, freed from the constraints of a monitor or screen, hovers as ephemera, as intangible and as transient as the self. For me, it represents the absence of the body, while the animation references the presence of the body. As the animated image moves in and out of the darkness, and shifts between states of indistinct motion and moments of clarity in which the filmic body is revealed, this notion of absence and presence (Zizek's 'Inside/Outside', 2006) is highlighted. In this sense, the viewer is asked to immerse themselves in the space by considering their own body in relation to the projected body, and thus to engage with the liminality of the work in relation to their own sense of self.

As meaning is contingent upon the context in which the work may be read, the opportunity to re-install previous work in a different site is an opportunity to reassess and reinterpret reflexive engagement in the research process. As such, the communicative possibilities of *Dis/Integrate* (2009) shifted considerably during a group show entitled *Ummm…The Articulate Practitioner* (2009), held at The Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery (MBCAG) in Fremantle, Western Australia in February of the following year. The installation of the work in a different site both demanded as well as allowed for the development of a new set of readings. The MBCAG is a heritage-listed building, resulting in some major installation limitations. The walls, floors and ceilings of the building had to remain untouched. My control of the space was compromised and I was required to find other solutions through which to create an experiential space. With its huge, vaulted ceilings, the single room I had access to was also considerably larger than the room I had used for the *Immerse* exhibition. The small, almost claustrophobic experience of the previous installation would not be possible on this site. Thus the room alone began to dictate a change in the work.

I decided to install the work in a similar configuration to the *Immerse* (2008) exhibition, positioning the animation on the wall opposite the real footage. Again, the viewer was directed to firstly view the real footage as they entered the space, having to turn around towards the door they had just walked through to view the projected animation on the wall opposite. However, both the size of the space, as well as the lack of a concealed monitor changed the dynamic of the work and the relationship between each video to alter the immersive quality of the work. The re-installation of the work in a different site allowed me to re-investigate the communicative aims of the piece and via a reflexive interrogation of the original, inform my critical decision-making process. As such, instead of using a flat, concealed screen to show the real footage, I used a small television monitor, similar to those used to monitor the real-time footage of surveillance cameras.

The monitor was placed on a non-descript utilitarian table, adding to the footage-as-surveillance quality of the video. It was possible that the body on screen was being filmed as the viewer was looking at it, perhaps somewhere close by. This at once gave the real footage an immediacy and tension that was less apparent in its first incarnation. The real footage became a dominating presence lacking in the original exhibition, positioning the viewer very much as a voyeur. However, the moments in the real footage in which a woman looks directly at the camera, her intention and feelings unclear, instantaneously implicated the viewer in their own voyeurism. Suddenly, the viewer became the viewed, as the woman in the footage looked directly at the camera, at 'them'. In these moments, there was a power shift for the viewer as the woman in the footage seemingly acknowledges their presence, or their 'reality' and thus, by implication, her own. In terms of research questions that aim to investigate the reality of self between binary states of being, the real footage as exhibited at the MBCAG succeeded in raising these issues.

Indeed, it was possibly the real footage that subjugated the animation, made monumental in the huge space of the MBCAG, yet somehow even more intangible than in its previous guise at the *Immerse* (2008) show. Separated from the real footage by the sheer size of the room, the floating animation became a kind of 'ghost of the real', looming over the space to the extent that viewers crowded to the side of the projection so as to avoid casting their own shadow on to the work. During *Immerse* (2008), the enclosed intimacy of the space did not allow the viewer enough room to make this choice—they were forced to engage their bodies with the animation. In this respect, I feel that the MBCAG installation was less successful, as it became less immediately immersive or experiential. However, it did result in a slight shift with regard to the nature of what I want to achieve in my creative work. I began to consider my creative work from a perspective less focused on its potential to manipulate the body of the viewer and more closely with the ideas inherent in notions of reality and reality of self.

With particular reference to video art, Kate Mondloch's (2007, 24) 'spatial dynamics of spectatorship' describes a 'doubleness' of spectatorship:

> In a curious amalgamation of gallery-based spatial experimentation and political aesthetics, this model of spectatorship proposes that viewers be both 'here' (embodied subjects in the [tangible] exhibition space) and 'there' (observers looking onto screen spaces) now. This new double spatial dynamic radically reinterprets the conventional ways that screen-reliant spaces have been described and experienced.

This model refers to the notion that as members of the hegemonic 'society of the screen', our constant interaction with screened images has invisibly divided us from tangible reality,

creating a dislocation from both the real world and the worlds represented on the screen (Mondloch, 2007). As such, the viewer, when interacting with video installation works such as *Dis/Integrate* (2008), are "both here and there—or, perhaps more ominously…neither fully here nor there" (Mondloch, 2007, 33). I would suggest that this question of presence can perhaps also be linked to notions of the ambiguous and transient self, as an unformed and shifting condition that is neither absent nor present, conscious or unconscious, inside or outside, yet all of these things simultaneously. In such a reading, the double spatial dynamic outlined by Mondloch (2007) in relation to the viewer's experience of video installation is perhaps also appropriate in the case of creative work that is investigating these notions of ambiguity and liminality in relation to what constitutes the self.

A reflexive analysis of the installation of *Dis/Integrate* at both the *Immerse* (2008) and MBCAG (2009) exhibitions resulted in a shift in perspective raised by questioning the mediating potential of creative work and how it can become an outlet by which to investigate the extent to which the psychological self is constructed by contemporary culture. In such a society, what is 'real' becomes paramount. For me, the power of the real footage as it was installed at the MBCAG was in its investigation of these ideas. As I grew more confident in the medium of video as an interrogative tool the re-installation allowed me to renegotiate my creative focus more directly into investigating the themes of the mediated, constructed self as transient and ambiguous,. I became less concerned with manipulating the body of the viewer in space, trusting that the immersive nature of the subject matter, and the 'here but not here' potential of video installation would create the experiential outcomes. It is through this form of reflexive praxis—evidenced in my construction of a theoretical framework which I will continue to build upon and assess, ongoing reflexivity of critical analysis, making work, and public exhibitions has offered me a methodological approach that will continue to inform and direct my creative work.

Conclusion

In defining and investigating the integrative possibilities of reflexive praxis as a methodological approach in relation to creative work, and positioning within the creative aspects of practice the role of process-led research and public exhibition, I have been able to locate a flexible academic model that will form the basis of my continuing research.

As the methodology employed in my research, praxis demonstrates my use of reflexivity. This reflexivity demonstrates my negotiation of mediation for the viewer. What constitutes the self, is constantly reinterpreted or mediated. Social, ideological and intuitive information is motivating me to ask these questions. It is through creative practice and my engagement

with reflexive praxis that I attempt to shed light on the gap I see as existing within the constructed self. Within this shifting space, the transient self, fleeting and constantly in flux, is both vulnerable to and defined by outside mediating forces. By engaging with theorists such as Zizek whose writings examine similar concerns, and Mondloch's model of double spatial dynamics in reference to audience, and artists such as Viola (in whose creative works comparable notions of being can be identified), I am able to position my praxis within an existing body of research. In contextualising my research within this broader field, I am able to integrate my intuitive, subjective interest in the esoteric notions regarding self that I am making visually manifest in my creative practice. As such, I am able to alleviate the creative outcome from the potentially narcissistic. Incorporating the inter-subjective nature of creative processes by investing the work within the parameters of the social—the role of the audience, the psychoanalytic notion of being, or the mediated self—is shown to be intrinsic to the human condition.

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Figure 1.1

Monks, J (2008). [Stills from animation. Frames 126-128 of 2000]. *Dis/Integrate.* Researcher's own images.

Figure 1.2

Monks, J. (2008). [Stills from 'real' footage]. *Dis/Integrate.* Researcher's own images.