

TR\NQUIL[IZ3D] BOD13S:
TH3 [POST] POST-MORT3M COND1T10N

By

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ABSTRACT

Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition, is an examination of time, space, and place of being relating to the mindfulness of the body and mortality in the contemporary moment. The fully integrated human being is characterized by the ability to stand in the face of adversity and move towards the unknown, testing one's will to live. This project is focused on highlighting a vital, metaphysical exercise of confrontation and contemplation with mortality through static, kinetic, interactive sculpture and installation, based within an industrial-organic aesthetic. Creating an immersive experience with mortality as a means to awaken the stagnant body and being, *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* investigates the human being's disengagement with life, authenticity, and meaning through abject theory, embodiment and metaphor. In this document, I argue that the confrontation and contemplation with mortality is the essential pathway to the refinement of the self. The function of confrontation and contemplation mirrors my own experience as a person with a permanent illness, drawing upon my three brushes with death, to explore interaction with the unknown as a means to live mindfully.

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Figure 1: *Grasp The Light* (acrylic, plaster and ink, 1x2 feet), 2017

This thesis is dedicated to my wife and son.



With love and gratitude,

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Figure 2: *Half A Mind*, (plaster, 1x2 feet), 2017

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I

T H E / \ U T O P S Y

This is the autopsy of an unknown, unidentified human/ body/ being. The body is obscured. All vital organs and interior viscera are missing. Only a hollowed-out exterior remains. How does one conduct an examination of something that is missing? This thesis document is conducted in the form of a pathology report, sectioned off in four stages, simulating the four stages of a post-mortem examination or autopsy.

First Stage:

A preliminary investigation and examination of the exterior of the body. This equates to a series of speculative inquiries as to why - as a species – there is a dependency on the tranquil state of numbness, to the point of fighting to protect it.

Second Stage:

An external examination, moving to the lower abdomen and extremities, looking for any physical identifying trauma to the body. This equates to the first understanding of why the human being needs and desires tranquil-tranquilization.

Third Stage:

An internal examination of the organs, starting with the heart, liver, and kidneys; then the stomach, small and large intestines and pancreas. Finally, a cranial examination of the brain. A representation of deconstruction and reconstruction of its components, which is attributed to disengagement with fully integrated life.

Fourth Stage:

A detailed analysis of chemical and biological trace evidence and stomach contents. In addition, a conclusion and final determination of C.O.D (cause of death).

The structure of this thesis is used to situate a vital critique on Western society's distant and nebulous relationship with mortality and how current debates on truth, authenticity and reality relate to this loss of a relationship with mortality. Forensic pathology is used as a metaphor to describe a dissection/autopsy, which seeks to determine the cause of death of authentic, fully integrated life and the fully integrated human being within Western society and culture. Death is the word used to describe this loss of a relationship. There is no being anymore, just the lifeless body, the casing of what was once vitality - the human will to live – the abandonment of our post in humanity - post-mortem.

Structure of the Tranquil[ized] Body

“Could you imagine what it would be like to have someone sit you down and tell you that you are dying, the gravity of that, to know that the clock is ticking for you? In a split second, your world is cracked open. You see things; differently, you smell things differently, and you savor everything, be it a glass of water or a walk in the park [...]. But some people have the luxury of not knowing when that clock is going to go off, and the irony of it is that what keeps them from really living their life, it keeps them sleepwalking. It keeps them drinking that same glass of water but never really tasting it.” (Leigh Whannell)

This thesis project investigates a realm where personal experience and revelation become knowledge. The question is: how does experience with the unknown (i.e. mortality) transition to knowledge, in order to solve the greatest of all existential problems? The knowledge of death changes everything, informing the body of being. “No one can give you time, for time is an illusion.” (Marcus Dunstan, S A W IV) In 1999, on my tenth birthday, I was diagnosed with epilepsy, suffering from both petit-mal and grand-mal seizures. It has taken three near-death experiences and debilitating health as a result of the seizures, to reawaken this once tranquil[ized] body. I was first struck by my lack of concern for time as the interaction with death cast aside the distractions which prevented me from truly being alive. These interactions with the unknown provided the understanding that the human being holds the keys to the chains which bind them. The question is how far is one willing to go to break those chains?

My three experiences with death led to a large metaphysical restructuring of what exactly it means to be alive. The abject/ horror, which is embedded in all life, brought me to this understanding. This thesis functions as an existential exercise facilitated through industrial/organic sculpture and installation to illustrate that the contemporary moment is built in order to dilute not only full integration with life but also, to remove essence from both being and body.

How can you contend with the tension that exists between life and death? A disengagement with discomfort (i.e. life, death, mortality, and the unknown) narrows the question and suggests not to discuss these subjects. To a large extent, these topics are not on the

table, no matter how legitimate or insightful they might be as they give discomfort. In order to examine the current paradigm of our distant and nebulous relationship with mortality, we must begin precisely with what makes us uncomfortable.

We may not agree on everything, and we do not have to. I have seen death and have experienced the utility which can be found in the acknowledgment of mortality and fragility, which is why I have the credentials to test the fabric/endurance of human nature. I want to know if you have what it takes to deconstruct and reconstruct as a means to create a better you. This is what this project seeks to show you through a dialogue with the self and interaction with materials.

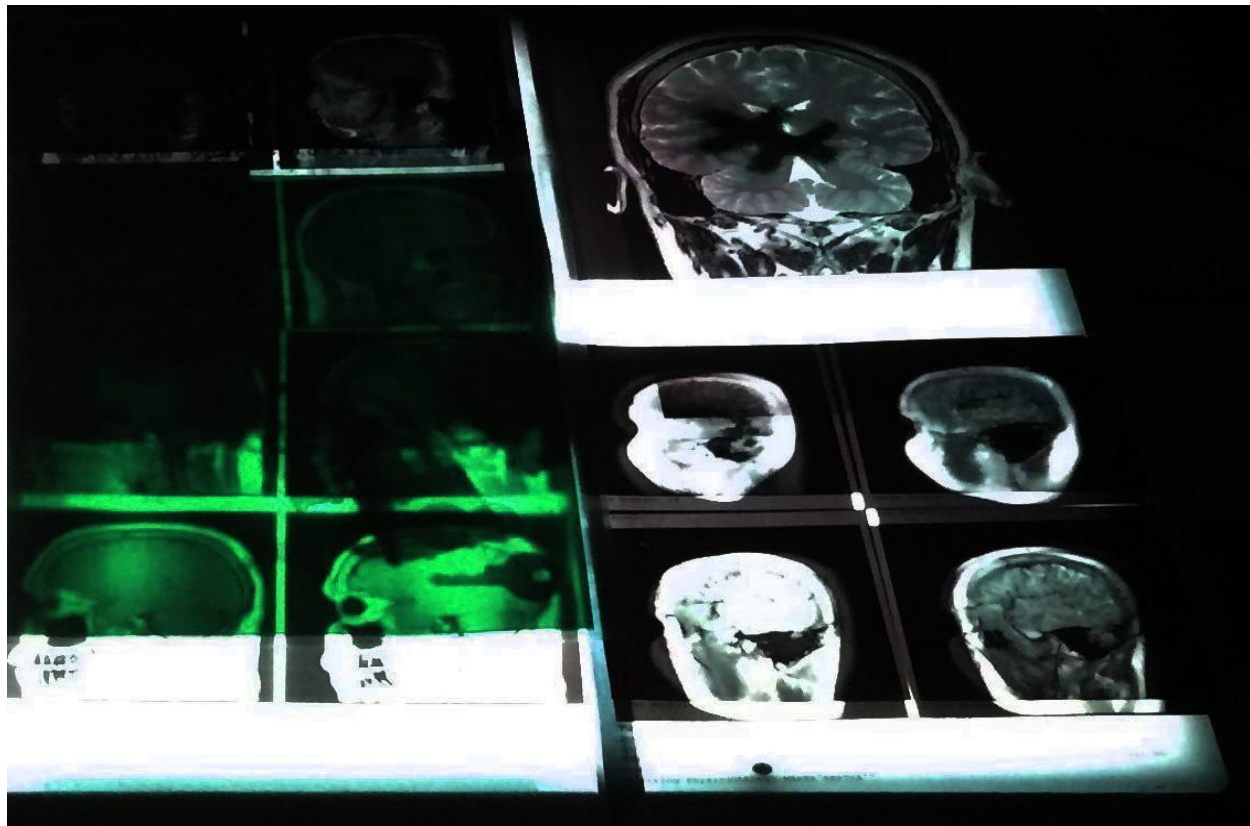


Figure 3: *Prognosis 3.0* (Detail from look book: *ST3T1CS*), 2019

The Human Obscurity: Refinery of Body and Being

The title of this project functions as a push-pull relationship of two realms of existence: tranquillity and the tranquillized. Tranquillity is representative of the false sense of excess in positivity or pursuit of happiness; it is the battle for a utopia. Tranquillized is representative of the tranquil and serene state of tranquilization to the authentic self. Both of these states of being

have oversaturated the contemporary world. They represent the dissolving, solidification, and purification of the disengaged, state of mindfulness of one's own time, space and place – the feeling of being alive.

Death functions as both guide and companion to a better understanding of your crucial relationship with life. When I speak of mortality, I speak of life and death as one entity and describe it only as a fundamental tool in the essential dialogue with the self. This project is focused on mindfulness/awareness which is achieved through the 'human refinement' of self by a perpetual acknowledgment with mortality; the dialogue facilitated through the lens of the body. I am using the body to describe (visually and physically) the current absence of core being and disengagement with truth and meaning (authenticity and reality). This disengagement happens when the human participates in systems of living that dilute or ignore the horrors of life (an ultimate reality/ hyper-reality) in both body and being.

This thesis has been a way for me to navigate through my own nebulous obscurity of body and being. Having the knowledge and - more importantly - the feeling that everything can end within the blink of an eye is the true feeling of being alive. It is this very feeling that is essential to everyday life. Facing one's mortality should not always have to be perceived as a negative concept. Coming to terms with mortality, accepting it, and even dare I say, embracing it, is the first step to awaken from the Tranquil[ized] Body.



Figure 4: *LISTON NO.01* (projection and photographic print), 2018



I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Tranquillity and The Tranquilized

“When people ask me, what race I am I say I am of the human race. [...] To sit here and tribalize by whatever difference possible that we can find rather than seeing what we have in common is an abomination of civilization.” – Neil deGrasse Tyson

Tranquil[ized] Bodies explores the oversaturation of false/synthetic representation and pathological states of being, positing that the solution is the confrontation and contemplation with mortality. Within this project, the exploration is facilitated by interactive sculptures and installation, which provides a useful space where the experience is reflected. The research is focused on creating immersive and interactive awareness of the self and mindfulness as a means to reinstate the fully integrated human being through the embodiment of mortality and the unknown. Through the utilization of an industrial-organic aesthetic, this project incorporates various manipulations of silicone, latex, resin, and special effects make-up. In order to identify and aid in the discourse of how mortality can regenerate mindfulness and self-awareness, my research draws upon my narrative as someone with epilepsy who has had three brushes with death. Primary research is a self-reflexive - a/r/tography approach to sculpture/installation.

Secondary research investigates triadic systems of the mind, abject theory and embodiment to explore and interrogate concepts of the synthetic body and the inauthentic being. This exploration investigates the current debates on truth, authenticity and reality, in relationship to the concept of "the good life." In turn, this thesis becomes representative of spiritual detachment and reattachment in a social system and structure which dilutes the term human being. The critical function of *Tranquil Bodies* is to raise questions about our own lives and hopefully about the true definition of the human being. *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* is the essential dissection of the self-contained human-machine, facilitated through the use of therapeutic methods of embodiment in the mould making process.

Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition explores the dichotomy within the utopian and dystopian spheres of human nature which cuts human beings off from the real feeling of being alive. Advocating for mindfulness and the appreciation of life, the project's function is presented as an 'ethics of life' by examining the death of authenticity, truth and reality in Western society and culture. My project illustrates how this "death" is not only the cause of the dilution of the human core but a key contributor to our distant relationship with the very

thing that can realign the fully integrated human being – mortality. As a means to be in tune with a heightened sense of reality, my work outlines how the cognitive processes of a perpetual state of confrontation and contemplation with mortality can awaken the tranquil[ized] body.



Figure 5: *Synthetic Resurgence 0/Zero* (epoxy, fabric and soil), 2018

Research Questions:

Tranquil[ized] Bodies questions how the human being can be activated within an immersive experience, presenting one with the confrontation and contemplation of mortality as a way to the refinement of the self, being and body. A/art is experiential and is meant to transcend explanation, as the experience is meant to inform the viewer/participant/observer - the human being. My research explores three key questions:

1. Grounded in my experiences, and in thinking about how human beings operate in Western society and culture, I ask, in what ways can Western society reshape and change as a means to repair our distant relationship with mortality?

2. Through what channels can the confrontation and contemplation with mortality refine the individual as a means to live forthrightly with a newfound appreciation for life as a fully integrated human being?
3. To what extent can a/Art and visual language or universal language (creativity) be utilized as the fundamental device to regenerate the appreciation of life?

My investigations are an inquiry into healing the rift between (us) human beings and mortality. The vital enquiry into what quantifies a collective, universal truth is essential to the development of my research questions. I posit that the confrontation and contemplation with mortality provides one with a perpetual state of mindfulness, awareness, and a regenerative appreciation of life. It is this very state of being that can be classified as an ultimate truth, vital to the inner workings of the human being's will to live.

I - Exi(s)t:

My project describes a “tranquil state of tranquilization,” a form of true being which has been lost. Through the interwoven duality of temporality and permanence, *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* investigates the positive and negative dialectics of the fully integrated human being. With a central concern for the state of Western society – given its current path – my project outlines a cautionary tale; to show how this synthetic and tranquil state of being, a false utopia, mirrors our current state.

My research investigates the physiological and psychological changes that survivors undergo during these experiences. There are vital facets - practices of being - which not only test the human beings will to live, but also reinvigorates the appreciation of life, the first set of fundamental building blocks to the fully integrated human being. It is mortality as a universal truth, where its contemplation and confrontation if mediated correctly, can be used to test the fabric of human nature.

Tranquil[ized] Bodies functions as a counterpart to an overarching narrative and commentary on the current state of humanity. The debate is situated around how to remedy the current condition of humanity for a better tomorrow. I hope to shed light on the solution to this problem, attempting not only to physically realize what the fully integrated human being is, but also, to begin to create pragmatic solutions out of a conceptual belief. My research draws upon

the fields of philosophy (metaphysics, existentialism, ethics and moral), psychology and human ecology.

There is a truth, an authentication of being, which holds to the willingness of being alive. “The artist is distinguished from all other responsible actors in society—the politicians, legislators, educators, and scientists—by the fact that he is his test tube, his laboratory, working according to very rigorous rules, however, unstated these may be, and cannot allow any consideration to supersede his responsibility to reveal all that he can discover concerning the mystery of the human being.” (Baldwin, 1962)

I attempt to awaken the human being from a mode of stagnancy through a mediated, interactive experience with material. I think of material such as steel and plastic as having a searing effect on the viewer; they are abrasive, manifested as something not to be trifled with. Industrial material does not argue. This goes back to my question of how the universal language of creativity can test the fabric of human nature.

Throughout the program, I have been engaging in a highly experimental body of work. Each piece addresses a specific issue surrounding my overachieving meaning and message of the appreciation of life and how one faces death; how the human being can regain full integration with life through mindfulness and awareness of the self in time, space, and place.

These works individually function as case studies on specific topics together. They outline a larger narrative of how the human being has become cut off from the true feeling of mortality, and how this feeling can regain a mode of being that has been lost. My project instigates an opportunity not only for self-reflection, but also for the realignment of the self through a dialogue with the body; arguing aggressively for a new, more active and integrated mode of being. Equally, I am focusing on the removal of the body and the absence of the body, in order to talk about the body and, more importantly, the state of being within the contemporary moment. “I exist, that is all, and I find it nauseating.” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*)



Literature Review: Returning to Core Humanity

This section outlines my own personal trail through the connections between artist, artwork, theorist, and theory. Within the realms of cultural making and thinking there is a language that is birthed through visual representation – a language of materials, objects, time, space, and place. Artist, maker, and thinker – these are not separate domains. You cannot have one without the other two. Artist, maker, and thinker is a vital triadic structure that mediates our interactions with the unknown. Creativity is ingrained within all aspects of being and life, therefore, I would like to highlight that this section is split into three parts – embodiment, being, and mortality, representing the three registers of this thesis project which are not conventionally individual. This section connects each register to key qualities of core artists/practitioners seminal to my research and how they and their work are linked to my chosen theorists and their literature, followed by artwork from this project as examples of these connections.

E M B O D I M E N T

“The best artists working in the [horror] genre don’t just want to provoke horror and revulsion; they want to reshape our sensibilities so that we come to look at some of the most outré images as aesthetically pleasing and erotically desirable.”

- Henry Jenkins

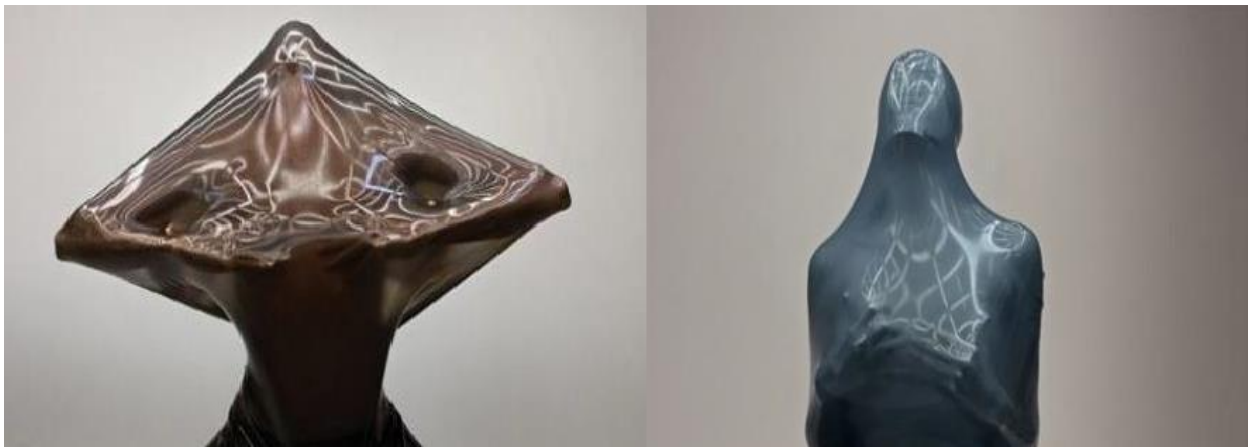


Figure 6: Bart Hess, Mutants (Series), 2011

Performance and performativity within a/Art and d/Design disciplines (such as special effects makeup and sculpture) and hybridization of materiality and the object, functions as a quality that flows within my practice, given my use of special effects makeup techniques and use of materials such as silicon, latex and resin. There is a component of abjection that comes

through in Hess's work – something that is important to note given my work's roots in the horror genre. The conventional perception is that the human being is a subject over and against objects. Subjects are self-sufficient entities that are inhabited and objects are these things that one dominates or controls. This idea of being a self-contained subject does not seem to exist in some regard when seeing Hess's work.

In the process from raw material to final product, the self-contained subject is not dominant. Rather, it is the object that is triumphant in this process. Nor is the maker, so much as what was made and how the materials' language speaks. Hess's work outlines a hybridization between body horror and industrial-organic a/Art and d/Design, speaking to a crippling pain and producing a visceral anxiety over the body's lack of resistance against the unwavering cruelty of industrial materials such as silicone and latex. It is this lack of resistance of the human being which *Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition* seeks to convey.

Reflected within Hess's work is Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, used as a foundation to argue that horror (art that terrifies) functions as an ultimate reality or truth within existence: "[the abject] is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that the "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence." (Kristeva, 1982) There is a contentious dialogue that arises through humanity's need to see horror within everyday life. It is a key facet that this project focuses on through the lens of fragility of the body and being, which represents the manifestation of the current zeitgeist of the need to see horror. Within horror, one is forced into a certain type of convergence, a kind where you either have a visceral experience or you don't. Reaction is rooted in cause and effect. Throughout the growth of my practice and personal life experience, I gained a rigorous grounding in the love of horror. Through that, I gained a profound understanding of the importance that horror holds within society, most of which I learned at a very young age.

The human desire to seek out horror in everyday life and our fascination with what we fear is something that is not only essential but desirable and has carried through as a constant underpinning of my work. It is something that is only amplified by the investigations of the interwoven duality of life and death - mortality. This led me to a synthesis of ideas surrounding horror and the abject, in conjunction with my experiences with death which became a catalyst for the construction of this thesis. The concept of cherishing life is just one of the fundamental truths; that the human being not just lives a happy life, but an authentic one. Through an

examination of existentialist thought, I began identifying the horror genre as a manifestation of pop culture; as a mode of personal reflection, contemplation and confrontation.

The echo of a scream – a calling to a relationship and interaction that is essential to our survival. This project provides the human being with a conduit through which one can be uniquely susceptible to an entity that is alien to us. This entity is the void where a specific type of interactivity can take place; a state of interactive engagement that is mediated through the physicality of confronted space and not the familiar mode of physical interaction.



Figure 7: Best Before (plaster and light), 2018

The cornerstone of this body of work moulds a conversation with death, exploring the space between ambiguous forms, how to carry yourself in the world, and authenticity. Light is a crucial component of this project; the light which guides the human being through the exhibition is the light emitting from the work. The integration of light provides a shimmer of hope within the project. Like being naked with the self, embodiment takes place in how the human being places themselves within the void presented, a fine form in fragility, a demolition and defragmentation of the self to reconstruct the physical representation of the unknown. These

voids speak to a journey into delicacy and frailty, and the way light conveys that feeling. Light represents the removal of the conscious self to create a new language that works with frailty and body. In this way, the project speaks to sensory a/Art. The space created is soothing and provides a moment where the human being is one with everything. The calmness is in the body, a powerful set of organic energy needing to escape.

Roman Krznic reports the scientific consensus that “the human being possesses up to ten senses, which work closely together to create our experiences - a 'sense' is defined as a physical mechanism by which information from the outside world enters our central nervous system.” (Krznic) The five other senses are thermoception, which allows us to detect temperature differences; nociception, the sense of pain; equilibrioception, the sense of balance; magnetoreception, the sense of direction, which lends itself to the perception of wholeness, proprioception, the “awareness of body concerning one another and the sensation of their movement through space” (Krznic) I pose that the practices of cultural making and thinking are sufficiently experienced through the senses of the human body as universal languages and act as a catalyst for the solution to the weight of existence. Facilitated by art/Art and design, the tranquil[ized] body can awaken the fully integrated human being, for the betterment of the sovereignty and integrity of the self and humanity as a whole.

Utilizing mould making as a therapeutic method of embodiment, creating shell casts of the body as a form of catharsis. The objective is to utilize the constraint of the body in the mould making process to shed the toxic, pathological aspects of ourselves to live fully integrated with life. Through the mould making process, within the cure time of impression material, the human being undergoes a state of bodily entrapment. This entrapment produces a vital test of endurance. It is through this test of endurance that one centers themselves, leaving the body (to an extent) and escaping internally as a means of restructuring the self.

B E I N G

“Horror fiction tends to be reactionary. It is usually about a return to the status quo – the monster is the outsider who must be banished from the sanctum. But over and over again I have created monsters that came from the outside and who call out to somebody to join them in the sanctum.”

- Clive Barker

We are all on a journey in order to get from one stage to the other and learn how to behave ethically. The knowledge of death and fragility can function as a storehouse of techniques on how to survive on the road of life. We are tied into our perceptions of reality and we manifest these perceptions through how we conduct our being. As a result, one can argue that the individual creates their own secular road to destruction. Authenticity has become the new synthetic and in turn, truth and reality are obsolete.



Figure 8: David Spriggs, Origins, 2019

David Spriggs's work, entitled *Origins*, considers how a/Art is no longer a system of objects but rather an abundance of free-floating information, constantly and simultaneously existing and disappearing. The push-pull relationship between transparency and opacity that Spriggs conveys is vital to the inner workings of this thesis project; it is a vision of obscurity of vast information conveyance. In addition, Spriggs's use of a triadic system in *Origins* is fundamental to the sculpture. His use of transparency, layering and lighting are techniques that I have employed in a digital approach to the image; the 'stripping of the image,' and taking the digital into sculptural form.

A Battle for Utopia/Dystopia:

The culture of tranquil tranquillity eats away at vitality, allowing for the individual to contribute to a pathological diminishment of the human species as a whole. Rather than improving life, multitasking, "user-friendly" technology and the culture of convenience disguised as "progress as transformation", are producing multiple disorders. Byung-Chul Han's position from *The Burnout Society* posits that this specific state of being cuts humans off from the fully integrated experience; that life is the law. He investigates the current paradigm of human ecology in North America, examining it through the lens of willful ignorance and complacency towards a current model of living that diminishes core being under the guise of "happiness" or "the good life."

"The acceleration of contemporary life also plays a role in this lack of being. The society of laboring and achievement is not a free society. It generates new constraints.

Ultimately, the dialectic of master and slave does not yield a society where everyone is free and capable of leisure, too. Rather, it leads to a society of work in which the master himself has become a laboring slave. In this society of compulsion, everyone carries a work camp inside. This labor camp is defined by the fact that one is simultaneously prisoner and guard, victim and perpetrator. One exploits oneself. It means that exploitation is possible even without domination." (Han, 2015)

Byung-Chul Han interprets the spreading of sickness as an inability to manage negative experiences in an age characterized by excessive positivity, a false utopia and the universal availability of people and goods. What is death if not the ultimate sickness? Stress and exhaustion are not just personal experiences, but social and historical phenomena. Han explores

the stakes of sacrificing contemplation for constant neurological connection, ironically bringing about disconnection and fragmentation amongst our species.

“From a pathological standpoint, the incipient twenty-first century is determined neither by bacteria nor by viruses, but by neurons. Neurological illnesses such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), borderline personality disorder (BPD), and burnout syndrome mark the landscape of pathology at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They are not infections, but infarctions; they do not follow from the negativity of what is immunologically foreign, but from an excess of positivity. Therefore, they elude all technologies and techniques that seek to combat what is alien.” (Han, 2015)

The state of Western culture’s drive to the preoccupation with convenience disguised as the illusion of progress, as transformation is outlined in this project as the “death pulse”, that is burning the candle at both ends and understanding the inevitable implications and repercussions of what will happen when the flame goes out. In thinking about time and space as fluid and not linear, then the possibility for the awareness of self, wholeness and the true nature of being can operate with fewer constraints, possibly none at all.

The knowledge of mortality informs how both being and body are ingrained in form. If hell is other people, the question is why? The answer is rooted in the feeling of no exit. (Sartre 1955) *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* tells the story of the subconscious doomsday mentality Western society has begun advocating as true life; something which should be rectified as soon as possible given our affinity for Sigmund Freud’s theory of the death drive. “The society of positivity, from which negativity has disappeared, is a society of bare life, which is dominated exclusively by the concern ‘to make sure of survival’ in the face of discontinuity. Concern for bare life, for survival alone, strips life of all vitality, which is, in fact, a very complex phenomenon. Whatever is merely positive is lifeless. Negativity is essential to vitality: Something is alive ... only to the extent that it contains a contradiction within itself: indeed, [its] force is this, to hold and endure contradiction within. Thus, vitality differs from the vigor or fitness of bare life, which lacks all negativity. A survivor is like the undead: too dead to live, and too alive to die.” (Han, *The Agony of Eros*)

Imagine a machine that can give you any experience you desire –no strings attached. You can plug in, live out a fantasy life and never even know that you are plugged in. Philosopher

Robert Nozick holds that most people wouldn't plugin because human beings don't just care about pleasure, we care about being in touch with reality in a kind of primitive way. The irony is that within Western society there is a reverberation of apathy. Ironically, apathy is a solution, the healthy existential questions which should be perpetually contended with are not sought after. (Nozick)

Within his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard's fable holds that reality has all but disappeared. The real has become obsolete and indefinable, coining the phrase, "the desert of the real". There is a want; a need for a false safety in being asleep when one thinks they are awake. A desire to be numb, or what *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* would assert to be the dilution of the fully integrated human being. "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning." (Baudrillard 1995) "Without pain, without the negativity of the Other - and the excess of positivity instead – no experience can occur." (Han, 2015). Without the Other we have no experience. The digital is a medium of affect. The human body and being through this medium instigate effect vs affect, in turn transparency vs opacity. The glorification of the mannequin in conjunction with creating something different through broad-spectrum experimentation in materiality, inclusively entertaining the idea of 'the serial killer aesthetic action' posing the sublingual discussion of, the Other, mediates the disposal of tranquil[ized] bodies within current Western society. I am captivated by this idea of the wild goose chase and the insincerity of intentions expressed, the saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. How sincere are we when wanting to affect change for the better? The human being can either spiral inward or outward – the choice is up to you.

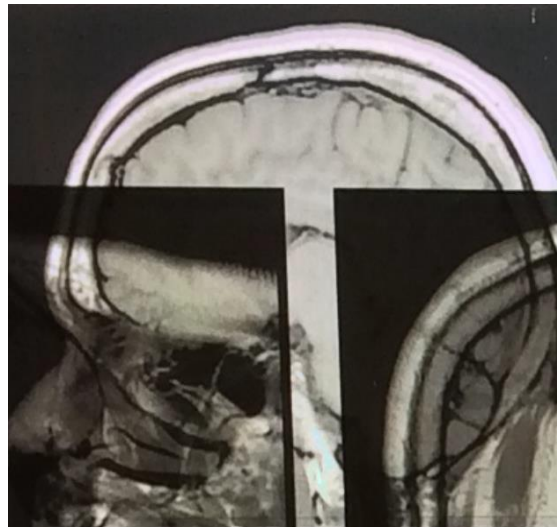


Figure 9: *Bodily Inversion: The Triadic Synthesis* (Detail from the lookbook: ST3T1CS), 2019

M O R T A L I T Y

“Representing the monstrous gives popular artists a chance to move beyond conventional modes of representation, to imagine alternative forms of sensuality and perception and to invert or to transform dominant ideological assumptions.”

- Henry Jenkins

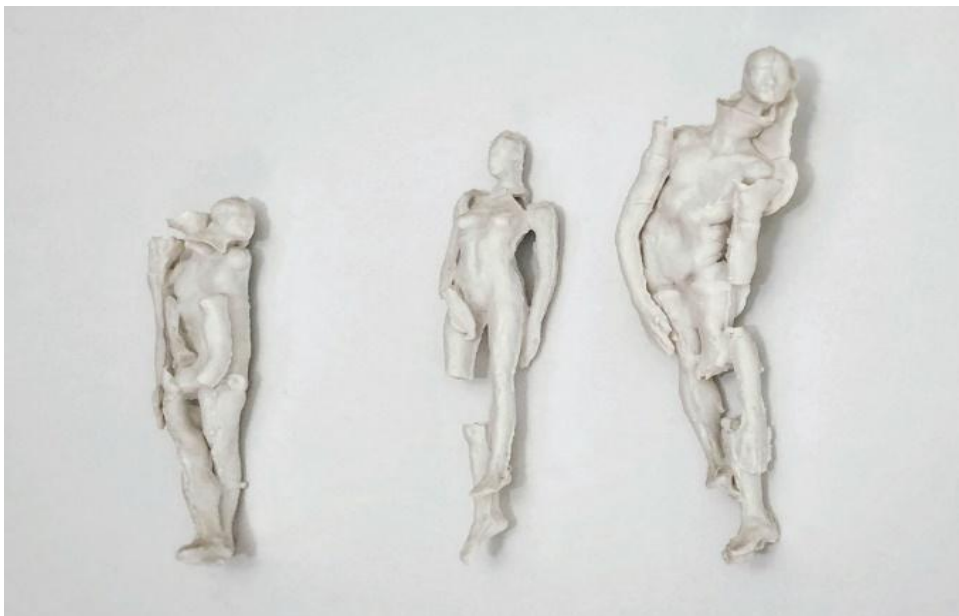


Figure 10: Emil Alzemora, *CURIO*, Porcelain, 7” Variable (ongoing project)

Emil Alzemora’s work depicts fragmented and contorted forms of the human body through industrial/synthetic material (such as porcelain, plastic, steel, and concrete), illustrating a state of 'permanent absence' (referred to in my independent study $F \wedge C 3$ as absence as presence) brought forth by object materialization defined in this project by the term ‘tranquil[ized] body,’ the everlasting presence of body which is void of core being. It is the human tranquil in a state of tranquilization where the appreciation of life is sacrificed for excessive positivity. I speak to this concept of absence as a presence through the use of bodily obscurity in presenting nebulous forms made from castings of living humans rather than constructed, sculpted depictions of humans.

The concept of horror as life is essential to the refinement of the self and can be seen as an ultimate form of truth or hyper-reality, given its confrontational nature reverberated both in

visual representation and materiality. The human being's unwillingness to engage with horror is evidence of this essential reality. There exists a preference to be numb rather than confront and contemplate the horrors of our own reality – the body, our bodies. Therefore, we seek out a synthetic/inauthentic mode of representation from which we deflect and escape reality. This is founded on the subjective feelings of an individual and how one views the world. (Kant)

The knowledge of death has the ability to change the parameters of the human being, just like a/Art, cultural making and thinking changes the parameters of the world. The nature of human phenomenology relating to human communication and connectedness function as key factors in the understanding of how the confrontation and contemplation with mortality can function as a solution to the dilution of the human being.

The discourse that drives the work is an existentialist view, finding truth and purity of being through the acceptance of futility, fragility and nothingness. It is within human nature to look towards and follow the light; it is what comforts us, warms us and makes us feel safe. However, what happens when the light becomes tainted? When darkness injects itself into the light and all that is good becomes infectious? My work explores the various dichotomies of awareness with regard to the exterior and interior notions of being.



Figure 11: *We Rot* (ash and resin), 2019

Existentialism's fundamental move is to make every human being aware that the full responsibility of one's existence rests on the individual. Only a being afraid of its freedom and the responsibility that this freedom brings with it, would seek to be the tranquil[ized] body. Within the realms of Existentialism and its view on responsibility, Jean-Paul Sartre attempts to reconcile the fact that there is no objective standard of what human beings ought to be or do—that it is a matter of subjective choice—with each moral responsibility for the choice. “I must be without remorse or regrets as I am without excuse; for from the instant of my upsurge into being, I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant.” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*)

It is an existentialist claim that suffering is a condition and an integral part of existence. The solution to the existential problem is to refuse to partake in the lie equated with the synthetic body and being; rather, to uphold the authentic human. The idea of authenticity and inauthenticity within Existentialist Psychoanalysis postulates that the individual should create oneself through their choices and then live with oneself as a genuine creation. A person is inauthentic when they avoid taking responsibility for themselves or their actions. Another way of being inauthentic involves being afraid to live one's own life, conforming to the expectations of others or imitating the lives of the other. Sartre engages in his own brand of psychoanalysis, by rejecting Freud's notion of the unconscious as having no experiential basis. Consistent with his emphasis on human freedom, Sartre argues that humans are not the plaything of unconscious emotional impulses: the human being chooses to give in to such impulses because our mind is always in control. (Professor Anton Petrenko)

Derek Humphry's work *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying*, outlines standpoints on self-euthanasia, raising an important discussion around “the fabric of human nature”. Humphry's “theoretical formula” presents the inner workings of what he calls practicalities of taking a life. However, this theoretical formula does not take into account the human will to live; “who should live versus who will live, are two entirely separate things”. (Marcus Dunstan, S A W VI) Suffering is essential to the refinement of the human being. Outlined within Dr. Kübler-Ross's refined model of the seven stages of grief (shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, and acceptance), the human body goes

through a very complex process which aids in one's relationship with death. Just like Ross's theory of grief, the dying body undergoes biological changes in preparation for death. The systemic issue is that these inherent biological changes compromise the human will to live. (Humphry)

"Lots of my dying patients say they grow in bounds and leaps, and finish all the unfinished business. But assisting suicide is cheating them of these lessons, like taking a student out of school before final exams. That's not loving, it's projecting your own unfinished business" (Kübler-Ross)

Ultimately, one should not commit suicide because it is precisely the awareness of the absurdity of existence which gives human life meaning. Suicide is an attempt to elude the problem; it is the continuing defiance that gives life value. Taking this into account, I ask the question: are human beings free? Is human behaviour completely determined by the environment one lives in? If so, are we responsible for our actions? The voluntary choice not to exist anymore is the most profound reconstruction of the human being. It is the one decision that the human being can not come back from. This project examines the discomfort and alienation of both the body and being. the body has become a shell of its former self - a false place of which we call home.

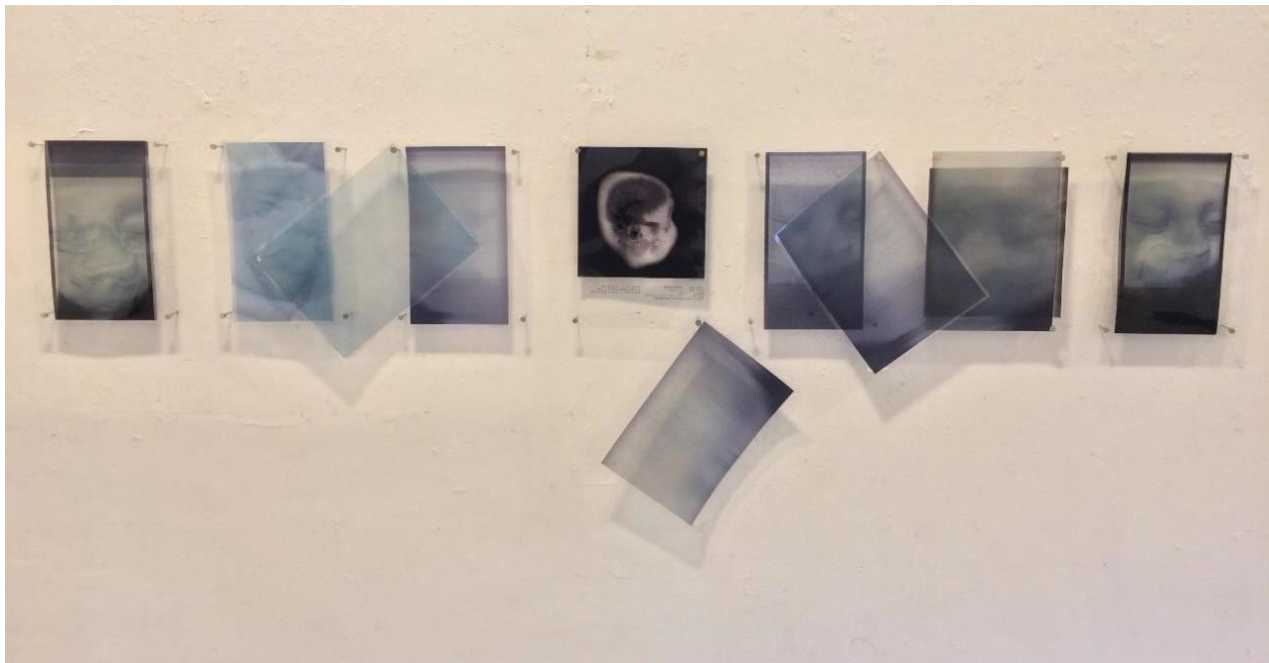


Figure 12: *Fragility Minds* (transparency, 1x2 feet), 2019

The cornerstone of this project is built on the relationship with the self and the political, social, and cultural aspects of the body; putting this relationship to the test and how it informs our ways of being. How one reflects and situates themselves within the world and our relationships with exterior phenomena help us contend with existence. But these are all things which are coordinated throughout the human body, as the body is the facilitator by which we operate (our substance). The body can be weaponized as a means of dehumanization and can lead to the destruction of the self. The body is the vital conduit to which human beings negotiate and contend with existence. In order to broaden the discussion of what constitutes bodies, there must be an urgency to break the confines of the corporeal and an attempt to claim agency on it.

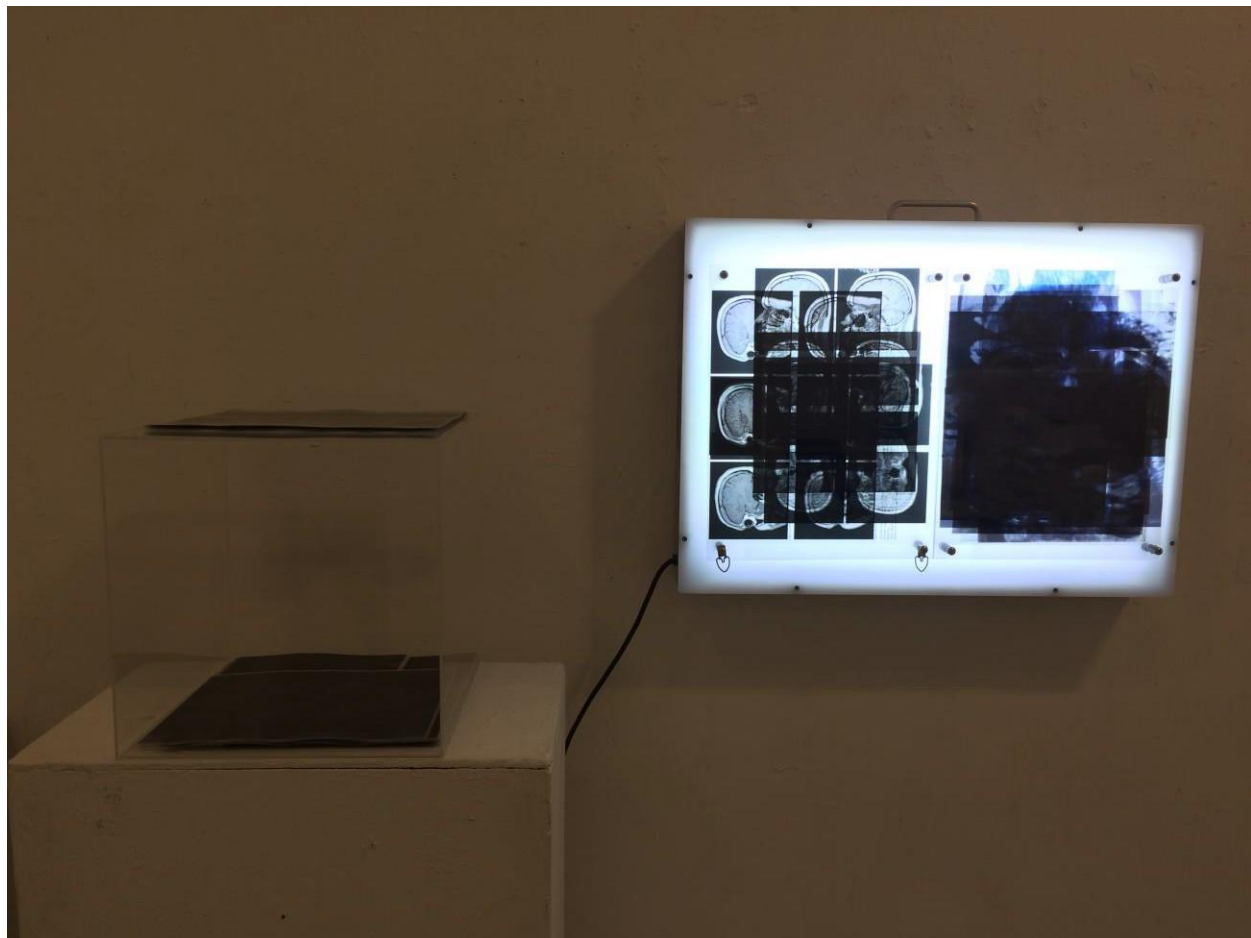
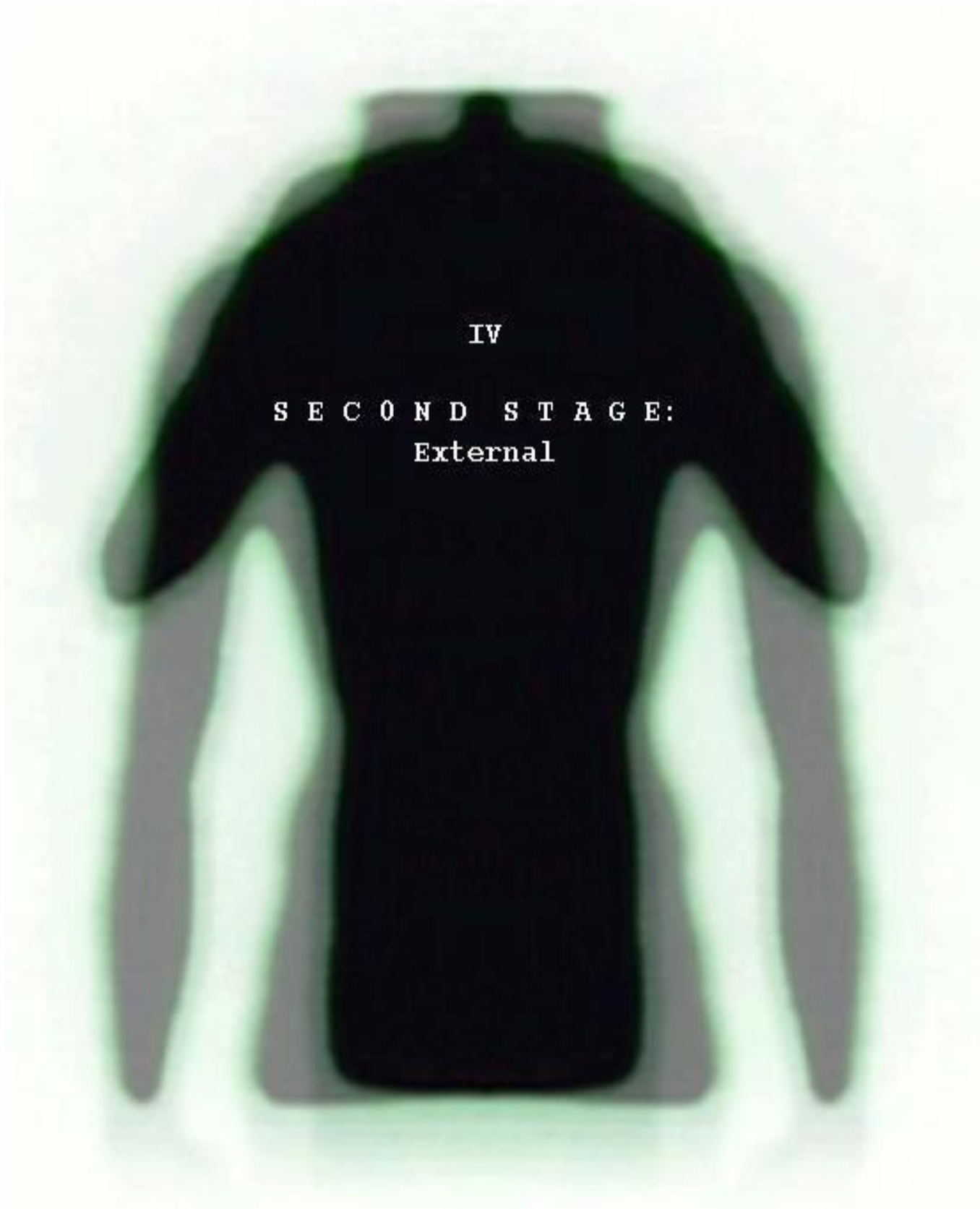


Figure 13: *Prognosis 2.0* (transparency and lightbox, 2x2 feet), 2019



M O U L D: Casting new being

Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition is a series of ten central works. Obscured bodily figures and sculptures made from resin and epoxy. These nebulous forms function as a dichotomy, outlining a metaphor between the dilution of core humanity and the fully integrated human being. This project utilizes mould making and industrial fabrication to create obscured forms of the body; shells, cast from impression moulds of living human beings. Each model functions as an individual case study for how the confrontation and contemplation with mortality can reshape being. Through a dichotomy of hollowness and synthetics, I use mould making to create an echo of humanity and core being. It is this dichotomy that creates a discussion around how to "mould" and reshape our nebulous distant relationship with mortality and how this very relationship with mortality functions as a way to live wholly and mindfully. I locate myself within a tradition of artists such as Dustin Edward Arnold and Nicholas Alan Cope Vedas (Series), Karen Lamonte, and Janvier Perez.

To highlight, my work differs in that I create a hybridization of casted mannequin and human impressions, and sculptural human representation to create the uniform obscure bodies seen in this project. This process is done strategically to speak to a removal of core being. Recreating a diminishment of being in body through materiality functions as a means to combat the disengagement with the body, being, and mortality. My work presents ambiguous bodily forms, moulds from willing participants who have shared a similar confrontation and contemplation with death to discuss core being in contemporary society and culture. Through the use of constructed empty spaces of physical bodily forms, I present absence as presence; creating an interactive platform for self-dialogue with the space between space. Through this process, I present a collaboration with the internal self and being.

As a means of communication and a structure of art production, I consider how the creation of artworks in an industrial environment differs from other modes of art creation. This thesis project functions as an experimental process of making through the negotiation with industrial material, where I explore hollow being, inauthentic being, synthetic being and the dilution of core humanity. Through a test of endurance, thinking about how discomfort can heal itself. The proposition is made that it is okay to fear the unknown. One must be "comfortable" in their state of discomfort as a means to begin to remedy the condition of complacency, a tranquil state of tranquilization which some human beings contain. The affinity for what is comfortable is

blinding us from what we should know in order to operate successfully within ourselves and for this particular moment in time, space, and place.

I chose to engage in a conversation with materials that presented the dichotomy of comfort versus discomfort. Through this process, I am able to create prototypes, consisting of a hybridization of two states of being. Prototypes one through four are constructed from cut-up bed fabric, sheets, pillows and mattress material. I have created these four bodily forms in an attempt to see which form will display the best result. These forms are symbolic of the callous and inauthentic layers placed upon ourselves under the guise of emotional, mental, and physical protection. I have synthesized a way to transform the aesthetic of the mannequin into new forms cast from people, as a way to bridge the gap between the synthetic and authentic body. These nebulous bodily forms – shells – contain an interactive component facilitated through the subtle movement of light and material.



Figure 14: Dustin Edward Arnold & Nicholas Alan Cope, Veda (Series), 2011

The physically copied form of the body is twisted and obscured to illustrate the tranquil[ized] body, and the living human used to create this form is a living representation of the "rebirth" of the fully integrated human being. Each model has their own experiences. Through the use of thermoplastic wrapped around a human-like figure, I have created a transparent human essence that expresses the concept of the outer mask one puts forward in society, as well as the emptiness people experience as they become so numb to the world that they lose their sense of

touch. I have created variations of this being, with an inner ethereal quality to represent different aspects of this human shell. Experimentations with silk which are used as a material to capture the human essence, was crucial, as it symbolizes the fabric of human nature. How to break people free from complacency? I posed the question: Is dis-information bringing about the end of the age of enlightenment? This project speaks to the relationship that the human body holds in submitting to the perception of being and how these relationships reflect ideas of dehumanization, blurring the truth of appearance, and connection to the calm or submissive body. (Vicente)

The interactive works of Antony Gormley, specifically *Blind Light*, 2007, where the spectator sees a construct that obscures one's image of the body, is an excellent example. Through this process, the method of observational research as an unconventional mode of investigation and inquiry is presented. With this artwork, the viewer learns from observation of obscure bodies. Gormley's work outlines the free-floating methods echoed, based within the process of art as the self-contained mechanism of producing research and information.

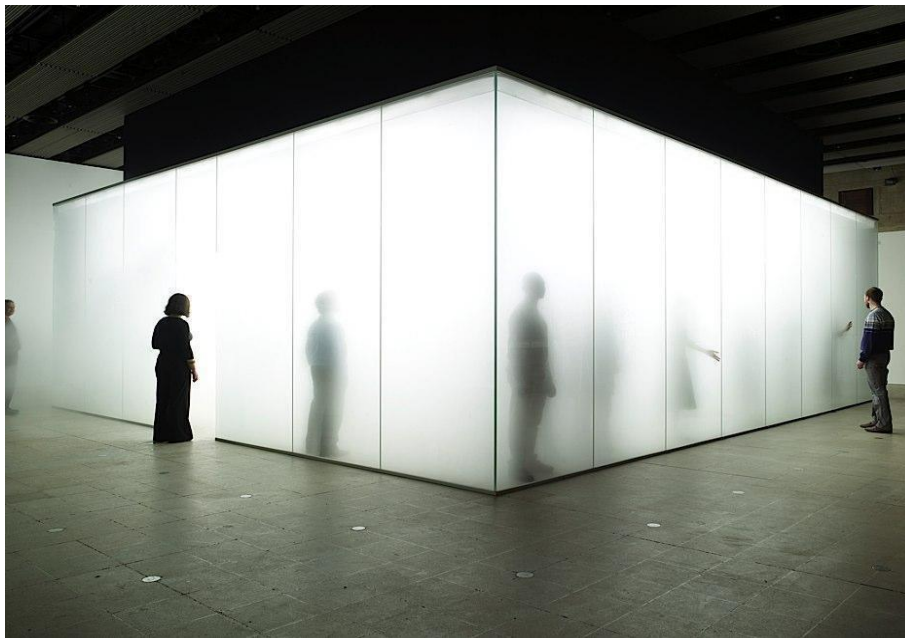


Figure 15: Antony Gormley, *Blind Light*, 2007

How death informs life and instigates the human will to live is what I describe as the fabric of human nature. People are complacent for a reason, and to be able to make substantial changes to modes of being, large scale shock might be necessary. In this sense, a near-death experience, or death itself, might be that trigger, presenting a push-pull relationship between

tranquillity and tranquillized, causing disturbance between conventional relationships and interpretations of happiness, comfort, mindfulness, and awareness, blurring distinctive conventional lines of life and death. Through the production of this body of work, there is a contentious dichotomy that developed between callousness (shells) and the drapery of fabric solidified by synthetic material.

Lisa Blackman establishes the limits and confines of the body and how to transcend them. “The human body is a fascinating organism. It can withstand the most brutal injury and yet repair itself miraculously.” (Marcus Dunstan, *S A W IV*) The external structures that inform our relationship with our bodies can act as entrapment and injury to the perception of the body. The limitations and the extensions of our body inform the navigation through time and space. Lisa Blackman's assurance of the liberation from the confines of the physical material body informs my central work's investigation of synthetics and the human as a shell and being incomplete. (Blackman) Blackman's work situates *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* not just in the realm of the physical, but also the metaphysical, with regard to tactile being (tactility meaning a multilayered quality of the human being) and the endurance of the body.

The use of an anti-aesthetic is married to the body being representative of horror as life and the abject. Parallel concepts of Hal Foster's dialogue found in *Compulsive Beauty*, and how the Other and the uncanny creates a pathological need to race towards death is crucial to the project's push-pull tension between Eros and Thanatos. This vantagepoint of the project is contextualized by the works of artist such as Clive Barker, Hans Bellmer, and Arpad Slancik who speak to a push-pull relationship between repulsion and attraction to what frightens us, ourselves.



Figure 16: *TR I A D* (black epoxy-resin cast), 2020

This dialogue is facilitated through the lens of the body and the works pronounced surface tension which creates an established synergy between transparency/opacity, absence/presence, and temporality/permanence. This aesthetic discussion uses the body to visually and physically describe a disengagement with truth and meaning. When the human engages in systems of living that dilute and/or ignore the abject and horror – an ultimate reality or hyper-reality – there sits a need to hurtle towards death; a vacuum in mortality in both body and life. Moreover, the work's dialogue of the confrontation and contemplation with mortality (mortality = life, fully integrated life = appreciation) outlines mindfulness and awareness of the self within one's own time, space and place as a complex living body in the contemporary moment; a moment that is (strategically) forgetting that the body walks and talks (exists); that the body is by its nature grotesque, elemental and terrifying.

What it means to be alive is linked to the relationship that humans have with each other and how we conduct ourselves in the everyday. Core being is linked to your fellow human and it plays a big part in who you are. We are such a divided species, disconnected from one another.

But we should be there for each other as a means to move forward, more than ever. Human beings must come together to address the commonalities surrounding the idea of 'being' and core humanity. It is through this intersectionality that my work explores the various dichotomies of awareness with regards to the exterior and interior notions of existing. It is an opportunity for self-reflection and realignment of the self through a dialogue with the body and the Other.



Figure 17: *TR I ∩ D*, 2020

Schematics of Life and Death

Tranquil[ized] Bodies brings with it a rendition of Jacques Lacan's triadic structure as a theoretical model and framework, pairing each of Lacan's orders with each of my own three experiences with death. Jacques Lacan combined the ideas of Saussure and Freud to explain the formation of the human mind and identity, outlining that the unconscious is structured like a language. Deconstructing and reconstructing Freud's trinity of Id, Ego and Superego, and replacing it with Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real, Lacan posits that the unconscious comes about with the acquisition of language. (Lacan)

Lacan's Three Orders of Imaginary, Symbolic and Real are vital components to the understanding of the structure of this project. My work uses Lacan's three registers to outline how the nature of human phenomenology and the nature of human communication are two key factors in the understanding of how the confrontation and contemplation with death can function as the pragmatic solution to the dilution of the human being. Triadic structures appear constant within many intellectual traditions, societies, cultures and religions. Conveyed are the geometric structures of the human consciousness which are fundamentally triadic in its spontaneous movement. The outside gaze cannot capture consciousness. The human mind spontaneously formulates the world in triads as a means to operate successfully and contend with the great weight of existence. (Judge) The human being seeks out order and builds patterns – the essential schematics of which to try and begin to cope with mortality.

My three personal experiences with death function not only as case studies but as a theoretical framework of my research methodology. Incorporating this framework to outline how the Lacanian triadic structures are vital, as each one of the three stages represent the stages in the fundamental refinement of being. I posit that there is a fourth component to triadic systems which creates a synthesis – not just a cyclical cycle of processes. (Lacan., 1972-1973) The fourth component is a synthesis of the appreciation of life. Together, they mirror the four stages of a post-mortem examination. Each component addresses something specific yet collectively speaking to the overarching narrative and metaphor.

Together, the three stages of understanding create a fourth component to triadic systems. Yes, it is true that one cannot have the fourth part in a three-part system. However, what I am speaking to is a process where the human being can undergo a presented triadic system of knowledge and structures of the mind as a means to understand certain obscure or alien

experiences represented in a fourth stage of being. The intersection between physical body, mind and absence as presence projected through the sculptures illustrate the transfer of the synthetic to the real.

My three experiences with death are situated as a form of structuring knowledge. My illness and experiences with death are my theoretical framework for my research methodology. Imaginary, Symbolic and Real represent my three experiences with death. Each order represents one of the three years in which my experiences took place. Each year is paired with one of my project’s registers: body, being, and mortality. This system illustrates how each order is connected to the stages of the refinement of being.

Abject/Horror	TIME	Imaginary	DEATH 1 (1999)	BODY	Self-Reflexivity	MOULD MAKING
Embodiment	SPACE	Symbolic	DEATH 2 (2011)	BEING	A/R/Tography	DIGITAL MEDIA
METAPHOR	PLACE	Real	DEATH 3 (2012)	MORTALITY	Experience	SCULPTURE

Death by Design: Critical Methods and Methodology

The deconstruction and reconstruction of the self are inherently linked to a push-pull relationship with objectivity and subjectivity within research processes. Death by design – creates the pathway to the ultimate truth in being through body and material. As human beings, we are to be mindful and aware not only of the time, space and place of existence but also of the self and how it operates within one's praxis inside this triad of existence. How is it that we create? How does what we create affect us and how do we affect it? As the researcher, thinker and maker, there is a responsibility; a responsibility which should be overseen by reflexivity.

Every human/non-human is the almighty artist, designer and maker, holding the power of reflexivity and agency. This evidence is shown through our existence and the way we operate within it. Every living entity is, by its very definition, creation. Human beings are cultural makers and thinkers because we are creations ourselves with the ability to create. Creation acts as the membrane lubricating the transition from the unknown to a sense of understanding as a means to contend with existence.

In considering the implications of reflexivity and its role in creative research, I have determined that reflexivity and self-reflexivity, at large, are crucial to the workings of research processes and act as the very facets of cultural making and thinking. These modes of research

hint to a crucial fundamental truth within the ways we construct and perceive our work as makers and thinkers through the construction of entities.

Reflexivity is a matter of mindfulness and self-awareness as a means to strengthen one's research base and the integrity of one's practice and being. Within this process, it is vital to understand how one's position in research has an impact on the individual by which the research is conducted. We are to reflect on our being and its impact on the subject matter we work within. The process of reflexivity is a conscious process that is known to us as an amplification of a cyclical system of crucial decisions. The fundamental aspect here is whether one chooses to be reflexive.

Research and praxis in and of themselves are based upon a self-reflexive and or reflexive exposure. In order to seriously consider the implications of introspection, the idea of being a self-contained subject allows us to question and critique ourselves where it concerns our work. As researchers and makers, there is an urgency to acknowledge various possible consequences. It is through this process that we add a personal component to our work and in so doing, humanizing what it is that we do as a means to extract the cold form that research. Reflexivity through a push-pull relationship between objectivity and subjectivity allows for careful consideration of our actions, choices and decisions.

We may open up our perspectives and, in doing so, bring forth a new understanding of what it means to be human and to be self-aware. We must seek recognition and meaning in constructing our research objectives to help filter out our bias in order to reclaim the most vital piece of research, a sense of the work that self-sustains.

If your research does not reshape you and others, then you are not doing your job. How does the studio researcher and practitioner change the parameters of the world through visual language? In order to examine this question, we must first unpack the importance of the role of the artist, the role of the object/entity, and the overarching role of creation. Culture weighs considerably upon the aspect of human-made objects. The production of art and its expanse within the realm of human nature and its search for meaning is reflected through the creation of human-made objects and human-modified objects. Graeme Sullivan's work *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* questions the integrity of art practice within the framework of contemporary research methods. Sullivan argues the importance of transformative modes of research, establishing the validity of the unconventional. Perhaps, just like the production of

objects, research is another fundamental tool in order to find meaning. It widens the scope of the field of research methods and looking at the push-pull relationship that exists between research through making and making through research. Sometimes the information we seek is embedded within the process and production of a work of “art as a site for conducting transformative research that has individual and cultural relevance.” (Sullivan)

Sullivan's questions are crucial as stated: "Consequently, it is no longer plausible to accept empty rhetoric such as the claim that the visual image is merely a way of saying what cannot effectively be said in words." (Sullivan) Sullivan contends with one fundamental truth, which is that visual language can go beyond conveying through conventional exterior language and, in fact, does something more. Iris Haeussler and her work *Florence Hasard* is a sterling example of the ability to go beyond language, pushing dialogue and dialectics, echoing the idea of the permission for the artist to "lie". Practice-based and practice-led research methods to exemplify the fully immersive possibilities of ‘pseudo-language’. Iris Haeussler discusses the validation of character, narrative, fable and its vital role in defining the elements of category for one's research. Seeing how these categories fit together within a larger conversation among new innovative modes of research, challenges conventional modes of research while establishing an overarching narrative, meaning and message within one's practice.

We have to be willing to see research methods within a much larger lens of what can be considered modes of research, practices, and rigour. For this project and my practice as a whole, the mould and the copy of the body is research. Morphological creation as a research methodology is the realm where conventional research meets the unconventional. Piercing through conventional approaches to research practices and rigour is vital to the survival of morphological areas of investigation and study. Simultaneously we must maintain the integrity of knowledge and understanding within these new forms of research processes. Art must have the ability to move beyond conventional modes of research methods as they are interpreted within contemporary practice. Research and rigour are transferable and fundamental to the creative investigative process of the artist. Within Graeme Sullivan's writing, there is a sense of desire to bring the research back down to the fundamentals of humanity as a means to not get lost in the shuffle of conflated ideas and theories.

Artwork can be stagnant when compromises are made. They contort the honesty and integrity of the work. The question is perhaps you? (the artist) must succeed where the other

forms of language have failed. Artwork must continue to ensure the survival of critical investigations into the codes of culture and various facets of human nature. How are we to navigate true creative acts as a facilitator in the transfer from object to the pursuit of meaning? Research and rigour may act as the catalyst for the validity of said creativity. There is a sense of universality which pairs itself with our species as a whole, to the culture and objects we make. We seek meaning and its fundamental core, the cultural maker and thinker, through various research methods, can transcribe and decode what has been coded.

Research as creation, creation as research, research for creation and research from creation acts as a visual language and is the universal conduit for all art and design disciplines. These disciplines are facilitated through unconventional modes of research and making; the need to be acknowledged as a legitimized form of investigation within the canon of art. As cultural makers and thinkers, we are continually contending with the unknown trying to create order out of chaos. Research and rigour allow for extensive investigation among hybridized disciplines, whether they be academic, Art practice or otherwise. As artists, agents of culture and society constantly trying to make sense of this world and what we do in it every day. Ultimately, culture informs us and our surroundings in order to help and assist us with our investigations.

We must think of research and rigour as the free-floating device that situates the artist on a grander stage of academic discourse and dialogue. However, research practices do not have to be entrapped within the confines of what can be considered the conventional modes of research. As creative research practitioners, we must maintain equal importance among all facets of inquiry no matter how obscure or nebulous they may be. This idea informs my practice, acting as a defence of the concept that pop culture as a reference and fundamental basis for the production of a particular body of work holds credence. Film and pop culture help us to articulate the modern myths that our society finds predominant. They validate them, informing us of how to navigate within the world, which is a very textured way of creating a dialogue within art.

Gormley's use of time, space and place in relation to the body contains an essence that speaks volumes to how I formulate the aesthetic catalyst for my work. Gormley's work brings forth the very unified "echo" of the body. The body is there, but simultaneously, it is not. This "present absence," or what Gormley would consider the push for the full potential of the human form within sculpture, is highlighted in this project as the synthetic human. Thinking about a mannequin-esque aesthetic or the human body as shell, hollowed out and empty. In this project, I

seek to push for the full potential of not just the human form but the human body and being as well, investigating the realms of form and formlessness coexisting in one entity.



Figure 18: Antony Gormley, *Passage*, 2016

Solitary Confinement: The Fully Integrated Cultural Maker and Thinker

No one dares to address and acknowledge the monumental power that the artist and creative mind holds. Within his work titled *The Creative Process*, James Baldwin speaks to the greatest of all games that the cultural maker and thinker plays. “There are some games in life that you do not get to play unless you are all in.” (Peterson) The burden of assuming the role of the artist is to take on the responsibility of someone who functions as a primary conduit between the known and the unknown. The artist reaches forth with great courage to translate chaos into order. It is through this process that the artist informs and guides their fellow human, society and culture as a means for humanity to contend with the tragedy of existence. However, the price the artist pays is great and comes in the form of suffering, fear, death, internal and external conflict. No matter how much success and notoriety, the responsibility that is shouldered by the artist casts a very large shadow. Regardless of the complementary methodologies utilized, it is our work's action and very nature as artists to place the researcher (the subject) as a center to translate a contentious existence. Baldwin discusses that pain and suffering take many forms and are abstract for the artist. In the hopes of provoking a sublingual discussion between the artwork and the individual, the overarching narrative is a confrontation and contemplation of mortality as

a human translated through the creative process in hopes of regaining new-found wisdom and appreciation for life. Through this process, one attempts to render passive users into active creators, action and reflection as the critical dialogue.

Dr. Suzanne Morrisette poses the question: what is this thing we call methodology? Perhaps, this is the greatest research method, to locate oneself as the artist, injecting urgency to respond in life and act rather than to observe for the betterment of our world. The creative process helps humans contemplate and confront areas of discomfort to ask (among many other questions) what does it mean to be free? These are highly problematic, philosophical problems, although these paths of inquiry are not high on the conscious and subconscious list of things that are important to the average human being. This is where the role of the artist steps in. The artist has a social responsibility that is situated within the context of reconciliation, building relationships with the unknown and engaging in the practice of the identification of rules and which of them should be broken (taking risks). This is how we get rid of egocentricity within art. This is our solitary unravelling; the fully integrated cultural maker and thinker does not deny the weight they carry. We hear the call and always answer willingly, for it is the artist who engages in a very 'alien' language (of the creative). With it comes this sense of aloneness and various forms of suffering for better or for worse.

Life brings with it the unknown and radical uncertainty; to be alive is to continually contend with existence and the world around us. The artist takes on a call to being by the process of thinking through making. This creates the visual language through the human-made object to help us define our exterior and interior phenomenon in existence. With great conviction, Baldwin places the importance that the artist holds in society and culture. Perhaps the artist is set apart as others within our species to help propel us forward. The defining of the multiple variables of our existence is predominantly reliant on the artist and the creative mind. The sacrifice for the artist is that of history and memory.

Through their work: *A/r/tography as Living Inquiry Through Art and Text*, Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin and Sylvia Wilson Kind clearly outline the fundamental truths James Baldwin strives to illustrate. This is done through an in-depth investigation into the current understanding of arts-based research as an enacted, living inquiry through six versions of a/r/tography: contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess. Practice-based research, thinking through making and a/r/tography, exemplifies the

fundamental groundwork by which art and the artist become its research methodology; a central core approach to qualitative and quantitative research apart from all the rest.

Work that narrates these assertions made by James Baldwin are the works of Katie Paterson, coupled with the dialogue of artists such as Andrew Zealley, who speak to a profound, respectful form of self-reflexivity through a/r/tography. In her piece entitled *All The Dead Stars*, 2009 (laser-etched anodized aluminum, 200 x 300 cm), Paterson attempts the daunting task of not only the quantification of nothingness, but also speaks through the idea of the missed relationships in the world. She does this by documenting every death of a star ever recorded. By tracking supernovas, one is confronted with a sense of loss to which we are entirely alien. A feeling of emptiness or hollowness, echoing the solitary confinement of the artist (as illustrated in James Baldwin's writing), the physical representation of the body and being a shell – an empty casing to which this project conveys. Katie Paterson's work also exemplifies concepts put forth within Karen Barad's piece, *What is the Measure of Nothingness?* Here, the central area of inquiry is the quantification of nothingness as substance, acknowledging how small we are and providing a greatly needed perspective.

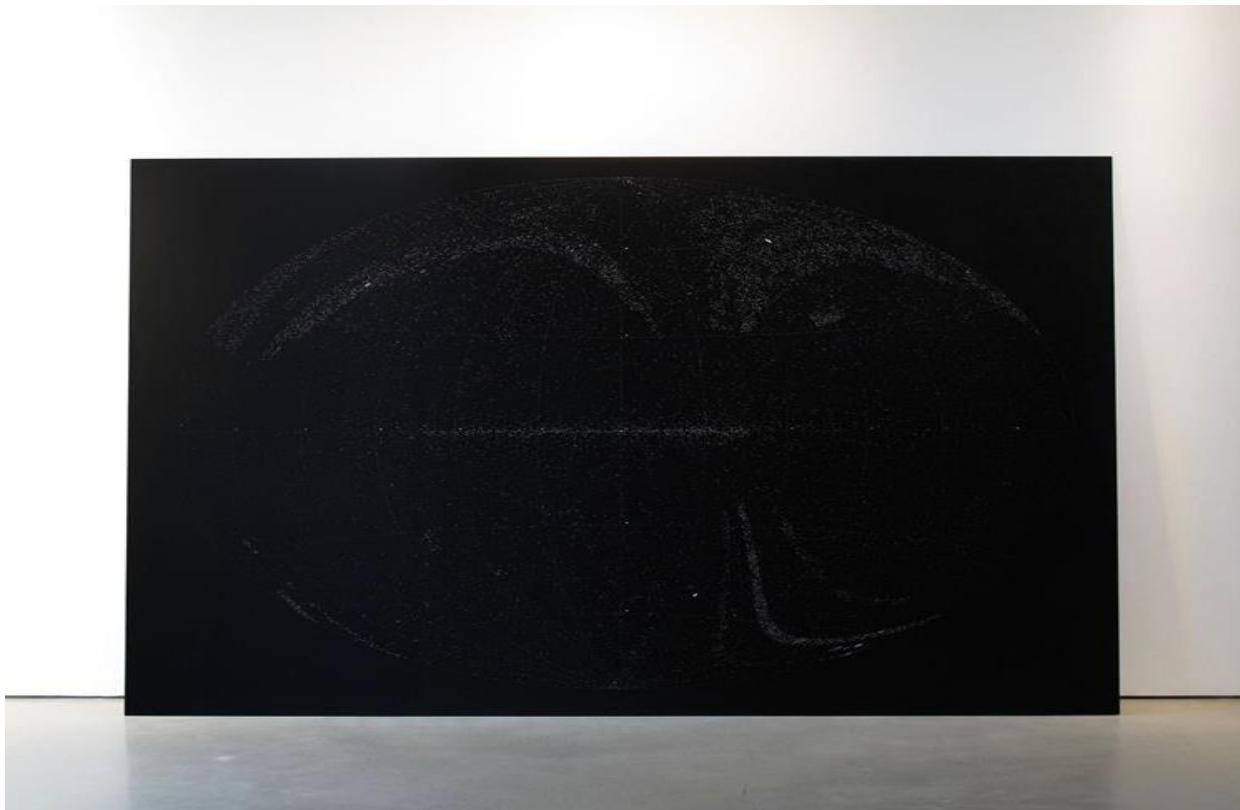


Figure 19: Katie Paterson. *All The Dead Stars*, 2009. (laser-etched anodized aluminum)



Research and Creation

Through my studio work, I explore the awareness of the self and the awakening from stagnancy through issues of confrontation and contemplation with mortality. I use my studio practice as an avenue through which to investigate issues of alienation and the fragmentation of core humanity; concepts of suffering as healing and the behavioural outcome of confronting mortality through embodiment with constructed space – the void. The material experience of the project expresses this aesthetically by my use of mould making, special effects makeup and experimentations with organic form – what I refer to as industrial-organic. The juxtaposition between life and death through metaphor outlines the body through materiality and how representations of the body through materiality is translated. It is through this process that my work investigates the critical task of mapping where the body is presently situated within the realms of academic/artistic practice.

As an artist with a background in studio-based research, the areas of my proficiency lie within static and kinetic sculpture and installation through mould making, painting, and metal fabrication. Through manipulations of silicone and latex, along with the use of special effects make-up, industrial materials and chemicals in mould making, my work's aesthetic explores the body, mind, soul and spirit and their physical representation through embodiment.

What degree of agency does the body have in combating our willingness to accept the opinions of the 'cyber body'? The body of the computer, high technology and machine; the body that holds limitations. Digitally manipulated graphic representation of the tranquil[ized] body is categorized by how the removal of tactility within digital platforms of experience negates physicality. The negotiations with resin and fibreglass in the studio process had been very valuable, informing the fabric of human nature.



Figure 20: *Project (I)CON* (detail from photographic contact sheet), 2019

Project (I) C0N: The intersectionality between the physical body, absence as presence, the digital, and the real.

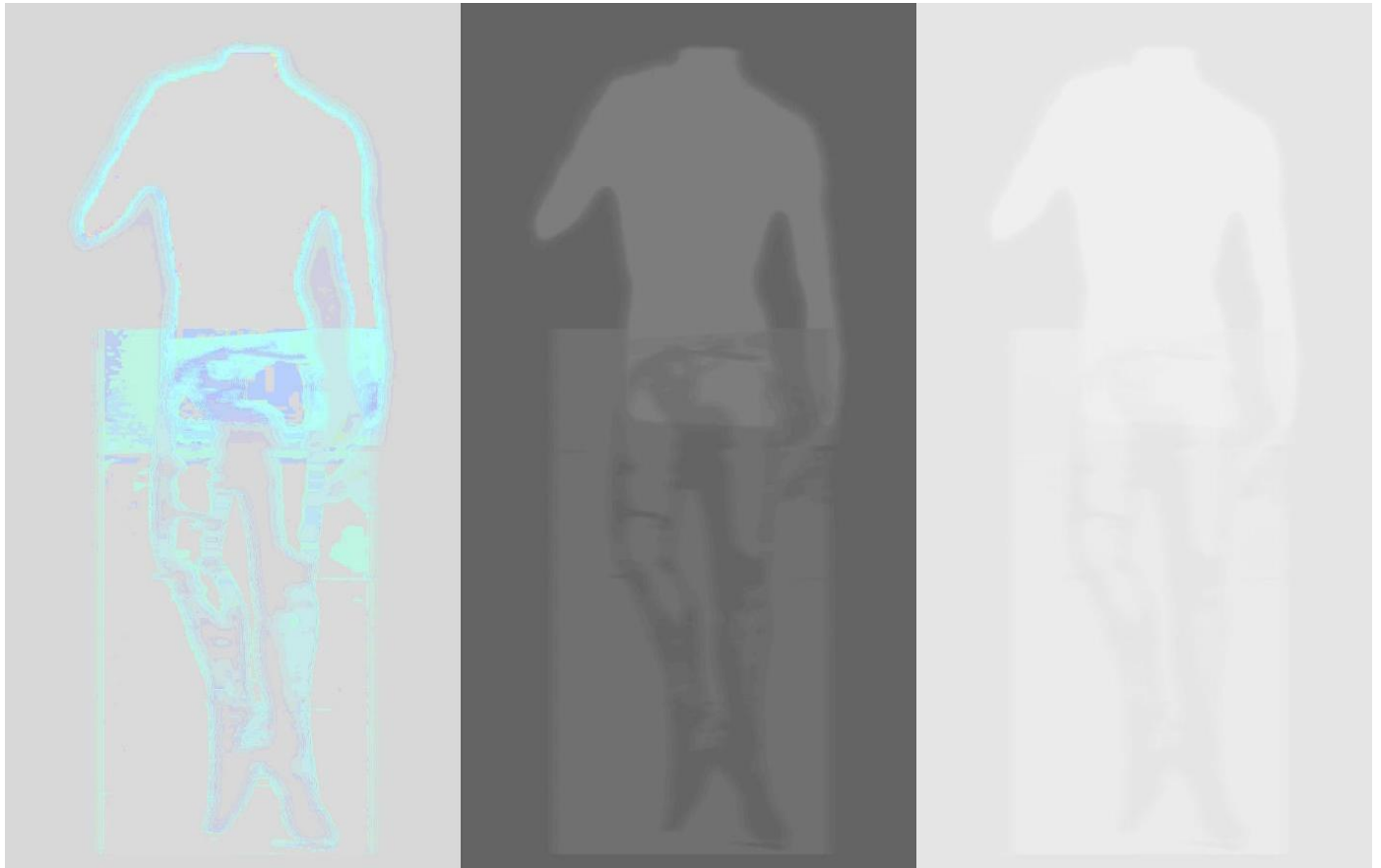


Figure 21: *Project (I) C0N* (photograph projection scan and photo manipulation), 2019

Project (I)C0N is a body of digital work outlining the realm of reproduction and the copy, mirroring that of the synthetic in the age of mechanical and digital reproduction. This area of the project explores the concept of the synthetic body and inauthentic being as defined and presented in *Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition*. It employs reproduced and digitally manipulated images of Michelangelo's *David*, combined with images of a real body. The project seeks to explore the stripping of meaning through reproduction in order to create something even more nebulous, obscure and malevolent. Within *project (I)C0N*, *David* is not *David* anymore. Other practitioners throughout the canon of a/Art history have illuminated this facet of inquiry, namely Mark Quinn (self-portrait) and Ted Lawson (*Ghost in the Machine*, *Robot Drawing*, 2014, Artist's blood on archival paper). These artists seek to inject authenticity of the body in the work. Their methods of representation extract, retract and redact the truth of the body and presence of being. Given that *David's* figure or configuration is mal proportioned and imperfect, *Project (I)C0N* seeks to

hone in on the echo of imperfection, particularly given the predominant glorification of the body within David to echo the inauthentic, synthetic body. The driving for perfection or utopia is not perfect or utopian, but rather dystopic in nature, the perfect model in which to create a dialogue surrounding the forcible extraction of a fully integrated life.

It is in this process that *David* loses his "David-ness" and where the tranquil[ized] body succeeds. I pose that this image has little or nothing to do with Michelangelo's David. The social, political, cultural and aesthetic implications of Michelangelo's David become void. This image is an echo of a scream – a silent scream of wholeness, essence and strength.

With the impression of heightened contrapasso, David illustrates an echo of "true" tranquillity in a moment in time, at a moment where David stands between conscious choice and action. This moment is a perfect illustration of one of the main traits defining the fully integrated human being – a concept which runs parallel to the term "pre- mortem", as outlined in *Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition*. Human, being and body are linked in the tranquil[ized] and pre-mortem mind and in the inability vs the ability to do what is needed to survive. David (representational of power, strength and determination for life) brings about a paradoxical state. It outlines the primary case study put forth within *Tranquil[ized] Bodies*, depicting a cautionary tale of how this artificiality is a false utopia and mirrors our current age.

Within *The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems*, Bill Nichols re-examines how our assumptions regarding the split between a/Art and life have been further emptied and ontologically transformed within distributed network systems in the digital age. Because of the luxury and accessibility of reproductive technologies, Nichols determines that the nature of a/Art becomes increasingly interactive. (Nichols) I would argue that our interaction with a/Art shapes social and cultural realities, and that the reproduction of a/Art employing electronic communication technology alters and skews how authenticity engages with art and consequently, the very structure of truth at large. (Nichols)

Walter Benjamin examines how photographic reproduction challenges the authenticity and 'aura' of original artworks and how mass consumption of reproduced art images transforms the ontology of a/Art. Benjamin's idea of reproduced information systems can be used as a central metaphor to analyze how the dichotomy between 'hardware' (object/material-based art) and 'software' (idea or systems-based art) mimics the structure of the push-pull relationships between transparency/opacity, absence/presence, and temporality/permanence.



Figure 22: *Phantom Body Syndrome* (digitally obscured photograph negative), 2019

ETHEREAL TIME SPACE AND PLACE



Figure 23: *TR^NQUIL[IZED]BODIES: TH3 [POST] POST-MORT3M CONDITION*, (thesis exhibition detail), 2020

The advanced and aggressive critique of truth, authenticity and reality in the age of mechanical and technological reproduction is not a new one. However, this area of inquiry has now expanded to set the president for the loss of truth, authenticity and reality of the human being. This is reflected in the human being's disengagement with fully integrated life (primarily in North American Western society and culture. *Tranquil[ized] Bodies: The [Post] Post-Mortem Condition* creates entities (artwork) that generates an interactive platform of experience, exploring mindfulness and awareness within the context of confrontation and contemplation with mortality and the body through interactive sculpture and installation.

There is a crucial discussion to be had about the fragility of life and existence. In the pursuit of mindfulness and the perpetual state of feeling alive, there is an acknowledgment of one's own fragility. It is through this fragility where one welcomes mortality. The work comments on the inevitable cycle of life and death to provoke an essential dialogue with the interwoven duality of life and death. It is this dialogue which speaks to the metaphor of the autopsy, hoping to uncover the current cause of the death of the fully integrated human being in North American society and culture.



VI

F O U R T H S T A G E :
Cause of Death
(C.O.D)

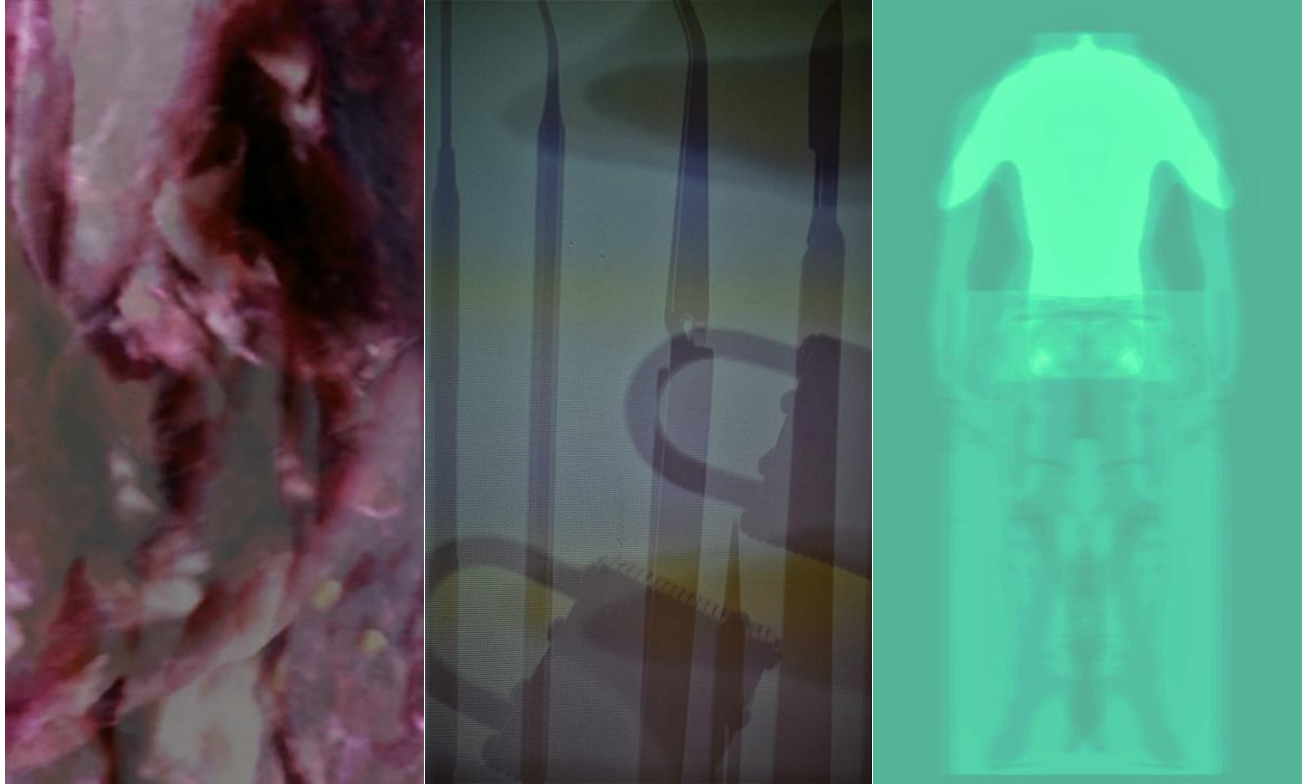


Figure 24: *TR^NQUIL[Z3D]BODI3S: TH3 [POST] POST-MORT3M CONDITION* (projection element detail), 2020

Exhibition Particulars and Review

For my thesis exhibition, I constructed ten obscured sculptures made from plastic and resin casted human forms. These entities utilize a combination of found objects (post-mortem examination equipment) to simulate an echo of a morgue within *Open Space Gallery* at 49 McCaul. Most of the work is dependent on and is realized through the use of gravity, represented in expressive surface tension. The space and location of the live site dramatically affect the authenticity of the artwork in a critical way. The construction and display of the artwork are informed by the context of the space in which the work is presented; the architecture and layout of the space being essential information. The two entities situated in the black box became the most gripping element. It was indicated that these two entities in combination with the projected text are sufficient enough to stand alone as the very definition of the project. These projections express an almost key defining moment for not only the exhibition but the project itself. The projections claim the main space and emote a commentary on the physical forms around it. This core quality about the digital image is important as it describes this idea of saying what can not be said in brut physicality of mass and form. This quality of the digital image in combination with the dialogue of the unknown is paramount as it paves the way for future research into what is unseen.



Figure 25: *BODY VOID*, (black box entity N0.01, black epoxy-resin cast with fibreglass and human hair), 2020

Summary, Implications and Repercussions

“In the face of such contradictions and obscurities must we conclude that there is no relationship between the opinion one has about life and the act one commits to leave it. Let us not exaggerate in this direction. In a man’s attachment to life, there is something stronger than all the ills in the world. The body’s judgement is as good as the mind’s and the body shrinks from annihilation. We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking. In that race which daily hastens us towards death, the body maintains its irreparable lead.”

— Albert Camus

The implications of this thesis provide a new space for discourse on how contemporary art can shift modes of being through interaction and embodiment. This study considers how artists, makers and thinkers can use altered variations of cross-disciplinary platforms to engage in art-making practices that affect and effect change in social issues and habitus. In turn, challenging ways of being as a means to begin a discussion around how a/Art and studio-based research has contributed to expanding knowledge on how to remedy the degenerative actions of pathological systems of living. In turn, this effort establishes and brings together our long, lost, essential relationship with mortality and the unknown.



Figure 26: *[Post] Post-mortem Body 01* (detail from Tranquil[i]zed Bodies exhibition, matte black resin, fibreglass veil and black ink), 2020

The Cure for Death?

My own triadic system of death and my experiences with mortality have not only informed my life, but completely redefined me as a human being and who I am as a person. For everything that I have learned as a result of these experiences, I believe that these bodily interactions have taught me more than I can ever comprehend. The utility of life and death is something I have spent the majority of my life trying to understand. Death is not only how life ends, but it is also how life begins. Our bodies function as the mechanism which propels us forward into the unknown. How we navigate through it is up to us. However, it is vital to acknowledge that with our existence comes a crucial responsibility; one that holds great weight. What is the cure for a terminal or permanent illness? The cure for death itself is immortality. By creating a legacy through living a fully integrated life – a life worth remembering – you become immortal. (Leigh Whannell)



Figure 27: *[Post] Post-mortem Body 02* (detail from *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* exhibition, black resin, fibreglass veil and clear adhesive), 2020

Prognoses: Projections for The Future of The Human Being

We are still a very young species and we have much growing up to do. We are divided from our authenticity and awareness of mortality. The rejection of mindfulness of the time, space and placement of one's own being factors into the diminishment of fully integrated life. There are many questions yet to be answered, and simultaneously, new questions have ascended. Truth, in all its complexity, is still only one component of a much larger puzzle. "I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself

is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world.” (Camus)

Mortality is held up as the ultimate reality within this project. It is what motivates, drives us and positions us. I do not think it is a coincidence that most of the world religions speak about mortality and the unknown in abstract terms but concretize it not in human mortality but divine mortality. What is the highest glimpse of what we can grasp as divinity? A good example would be love. The tranquilly tranquilised mind is the equivalent to a different mind. Thus, the lesser then becomes irrelevant. Rationality cannot solve all problems. There is something else that seems to save intuition, insight and perception. The kind of thing that comes to you in a flash; the notion of the good attained and disseminated as a message of hope. We do not seem to intend to destroy the tranquil[ized] body externally. By entering into the darkness of the unknown and bringing the light of enlightenment; the light of seeing through illusion, this is where the synthetics disintegrate.



Figure 28: *[Post] Post-mortem Body 03* (detail from *Tranquil[ized] Bodies* exhibition, fabric, black ink, metal dust fragments), 2020



Figure 29: *Human Echo Shards*, (black box entity N0.02, black epoxy-resin, ash, charcoal and fibreglass), 2020

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Figure 30: *Shadow Slab*, variable (Detail from look book: ST3T1CS, 2019)

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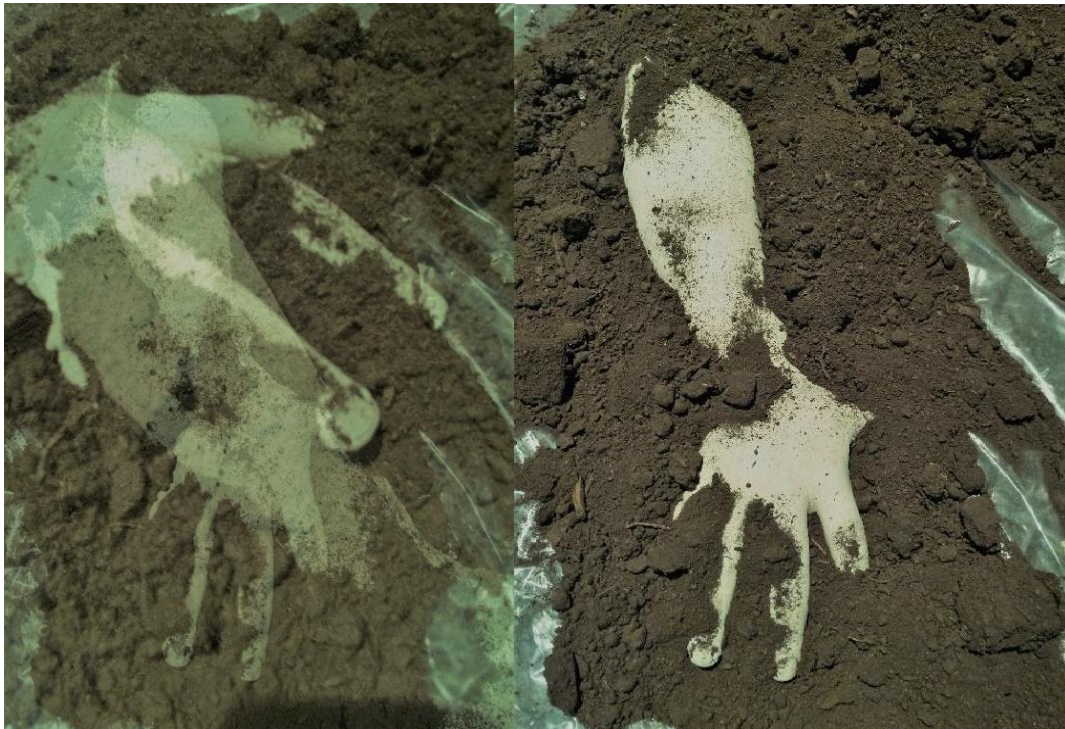


Figure 30: *D3^D GROUNDS*, 2018 (Detail from look book: *ST3T1CS*, 2020

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

Tranquil[ized] Body: The human being, diluted and stripped from the pure form of one's self. A complacent state in living within a static model of degeneration and inauthenticity. At peace within the disengaged state of living as a result of post-truth and utopian constructs operating as conventional notions of happiness.

[Post] Post-Mortem Condition: The state of current Western society and culture and its constant need to grasp a utopia for which in turn creates a core attack on the metaphysical substrate of humanity to reveal how dystopia reigns supreme and that utopia is, in fact, a dystopia in disguise. The "dead body" of current Western society and culture concerning key facets of Ontology/being (e.g., habitus and desire for comfort). An examination or autopsy of an entity/body that has already been examined, dissected picked apart; the deconstruction of something that has already been deconstructed- the death of death. The paradoxical second examination and the attempt at finding meaning in something that has no meaning.

Pre-mortem: A state of being which perpetually undergoes the process of confrontation and contemplation with mortality, through which one reaches the stage of acceptance of mortality and fragility and come to terms with the fact that not knowing (the unknown) among other realms of discomfort are okay and function as an essential component to living life.

Body/Soma: The physical exterior structure of a living entity that encases the bones, flesh, organs and, most importantly, the essence of being. A shell conveying the hollowness of being.

The Fully Integrated Human Being: One that holds an inherent desire to appreciate life more specifically, a sense of mindfulness, and like other species contains the most basic of needs, the vital piece of the human puzzle, the survival instinct. The state in which a human is fully united and immersed in the time, space, and place in which they currently reside.