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The gaze and the self

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Abstract

This dissertation contextualises my practice with underlying concepts relating to the gaze. The gaze is linked to surveillance where the body is subject to conscious and permanent visibility. I examine personal identity as foreshadowed by our own gaze and the eroticized gaze. The theories of Jacques Lacan (in particular his notion of the mirror stage), Michel Foucault (theory on social discipline of desire) and Laura Mulvey (notion of the gaze in her pivotal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*) are also examined. I draw comparisons with the methodologies of artists dealing with similar concepts: Mike Parr, Kiki Smith and video artist Marcel Odenbach.

Introduction

This dissertation is structured in three parts. In the 1st part I will introduce philosophical ideas on the gaze by examining Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory, where our sense of self arrives externally from a reflection or from the imaginary leading to an identity being based on misrecognition. Secondly I will discuss Michel Foucault's theory on discipline and how this leads to self surveillance where we are governed by our own gaze. Finally Laura Mulvey's film theory is considered where the woman is made into the object for eroticized looking.

In part 2, I will discuss the practice of three artists and locate their conceptual concerns. The work of Mike Parr, Kiki Smith and Marcel Odenbach are examined and I show how they relate to Lacan, Foucault and Mulvey. I also compare my practice in the context of these artists. Part 3 discusses my work in relation to Foucault and Mulvey.

Dissertation Proper

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychoanalyst known for his seminars which made psychoanalysis[1] acceptable in his home country. Active in the Parisian world of writers, artists and intellectuals of the Surrealist movement[2], they were influenced by his thesis on paranoia titled *Paranoid Psychosis and its Relations to the Personality* (Leader & Groves, 2000). Lacan's interest in paranoia lead to his concept of "mental automatism" which "brought together many seemingly disparate phenomena of madness under the common motif of something being imposed from "outside": the echo of thoughts or a commentary on one's actions, for example" (Leader & Groves, 2000, p. 8). Features central to Lacan's work are narcissism[3], the

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[1] Psychoanalysis: The method of psychological therapy originated by Sigmund Freud in which free association, dream interpretation, and analysis of resistance and transference are used to explore repressed or unconscious impulses, anxieties, and internal conflicts, in order to free psychic energy for mature love and work. (Psychoanalysis definition. (2009). In *The Free Dictionary*. Retrieved September 9, 2009, from http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ psychoanalysis)

[2] Surrealist movement: "A 20th-century literary and artistic movement that attempts to express the workings of the subconscious and is characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of subject matter" (Surrealism definition. (2009). In *The Free Dictionary*. Retrieved September 9, 2009, from http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ surrealist)

[3] Narcissism: Basically the love of ones own self-image.
Narcissism results from identifications with images and words that are linked to the BODY to form a seemingly consistent entity. Primary narcissism, for Lacan, entails the creation of corporeal image, and secondary narcissism concerns the dialectic of love and aggression in all human relations. Identification with objects is another process where the narcissistic ego can screen out the splits and gaps in language and being. (Wright, 1992, p. 272).

image[4] and the ideal[5] with his first major intervention in psychoanalysis being his theory of the mirror stage.

Humans are born prematurely with only partial control of their motor functions, so how does the child master its relation to its body? Lacan's answer is his theory of the mirror stage. Between six and eighteen months a child confronted with its image in the mirror is able to imagine itself as coherent and self governing. The child sees its own body as a totality, and senses a separation from the Other who warrants their existence; the Mother or Father. This is the moment when the individual is born and identification with other human images is installed. This is also when the ego commences, upon this alienation and the child's fascination with its own image. But as the child is still physically insufficient this image of totality is an illusion therefore the ego is formed through an imaginary relationship with its own body. From this initial reflection the child "moves from fragmentation and insufficiency to illusory unity" (Sarup, 1992, p. 83). The child only finds unity in the other, the image in the mirror.

A key passage in Lacan's 1936 essay on the formation of identity titled *The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience* states:

> The mirror stage is a drama whose inner dynamic moves rapidly from *insufficiency* to *anticipation* - and which, for the subject caught in the snares of spatial identification, fashions the series of fantasies that runs from an image of a *fragmented body* to what we may call the *orthopaedic vision of its totality* – and to the armour, donned at last, of

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[4] Image: Derived from the Latin imago, meaning 'likeness' (…) Within psychoanalytic theory, the concept of the imago derives from JUNG, and posits an internalized and imaginary REPRESENTATION of a (typically) familial figure (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). On the other hand, psychoanalytic readings of the visual image may be dated from Freud's study of Leonardo, wherein the interpretation of the image is thought to provide access to the psychology of its maker (Freud, 1910). More recently, feminist and deconstructive revisions of psychoanalytic theory and the Western philosophic tradition have put in question the privileged status of the visual itself, linking specularity, visuality, the gaze and the image with the patriarchal unconscious (Kofman, 1985) and also with the spurious spectacle of commodity culture in capitalism (IRIGARAY, 1985a, b). (Wright, 1992, p. 171).

[5] Ideal: for Lacan a symbolic identification with a signifying element is:

(…) an identification with the Ideal, a term which is not intended to suggest anything perfect or literally "ideal". This ideal is not conscious. (…) Rather, the speech which he or she hears as a child will be incorporated, forming a kernel of insignia which are unconscious. (Leader & Groves, 2000, p. 44).

an alienating identity, whose rigid structure will shape all the subject's future mental development. (Lacan, as cited in Sarup, 1992, p. 64).

Here Lacan is referring 'insufficiency' as to it is his believe that a child is born prematurely, unable to walk or talk it is dependent on the Other.   In front of the mirror the child then anticipates its own shape as an adult. In order to be oneself a structure is required but this alienates and so the child becomes a prisoner of his or her identity, individualised by its first name, by being the offspring of its parents or the member of a group. By 'orthopaedic' Lacan refers to the means that helps the child to stand up straight. The child on obtaining its identity actually only achieves identification therefore will never truly be 'himself' or 'herself'. Like the reversed mirror image, identity distorts one's relations with others. The ego is formed when the fragmented body gives way to the armour of the subject and its alienating identity (Sarup, 1992).

 To summarise, the mirror phase is a child's captivation by an illusory image, a moment of self-delusion where the imaginary mode begins. It represents the first instance of the basic function of the ego: misrecognition. The ego's function is imaginary, misreads the truth from the unconscious and alienates the subject. Human quests for wholeness and unity controlled by the illusory mastery of the ego are futile. The ego may give people a feeling of stability but the subject is never unified. Lacan believes there is a basic lack of being at the heart of the human subject due to the illusory unity felt at the time of the mirror stage (Sarup, 1992).

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French social theorist, historian and philosopher. Writings include analysing systems of discipline and punishment, sexuality and subjectivity and the relationship between discourses[6] of knowledge and power (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002). Foucault was concerned with the way humans have historically become the subject and object of political, philosophical, legal and social discourses. Systems of division where linked with and produced by knowledge and power (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997).

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[6] Discourse as defined by Foucault refers to:

 (...) ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (...) a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance. (Foucault, as cited in Pinkus, 1996). (Pinkus, J. (1996). *Foucault.* Retrieved September 9, 2009, from http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock//theory/foucault.htm)

Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison which was written by Foucault in 1975 is concerned with power over and within the body in relation to punishment in the political, judicial and scientific fields (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997). Part 3 of this book, *Discipline, Panopticism* discusses the power exercised over individual bodies in a plague-stricken town and analyses how methods of surveillance, analysis and segmentation lead to disciplinary projects such as the Panopticon[7] model.

The major effect of the Panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility so that power functions automatically even when surveillance is removed. Power is determined by a distribution of bodies, lights, gazes, therefore any individual, whether curious, malicious or perverse, can operate the panoptic machine. The panoptic plan makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power as it is implemented by a few over many, acts directly on individuals, functions continuously and automatically.

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault, 2005).

Panoptic institutions could be light, without bars or chains, force to constrain was unnecessary, fortress-like 'houses of security' could be replaced by a 'house of certainty' (Foucault, 2005). This was due to the visible yet unverifiable power mechanism where the individual could see the central tower and therefore were constantly visible believing they could be observed at any moment. Power is perfected as the surveillance may not be constant but its effects on the

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[7] The Panopticon, designed by Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), is a central tower surrounded by cells where prisoners, patients, workers or school children could be constantly surveyed by an unseen watchman (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997). Individuals are separated, they are seen but cannot see the watchman or those on the either side of their cell. This invisibility and segmentation abolishes the threat of disorder which is possible with a collective crowd.

individual are. With a belief in their incapacity, this state of conscious visibility leads to self surveillance[8], individuals monitor their own behaviour.

Foucault believed humans are divided into subject and object through knowledge and power. His main concern was power over and within the body which lead to his writings on the Panopticon. He considered the effect of this plan was to induce in the inmate a state of conscious visibility so power functions automatically even when surveillance is removed. The Panopticon is to be broadly understood a way of defining power relations in everyday life.

Laura Mulvey (1941) was born in Oxford, England and is currently a Professor of Film and Media Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London (Burke, n.d.). Mulvey came to prominence in the 1970's as a film theorist. Her early critical work investigated spectatorial identification and its relationship to the male gaze. With her husband Peter Wollen, Mulvey co-wrote and co-directed six theoretical films dealing with feminist theory[9], semiotics[10] and psychoanalysis.

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[8] Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (Foucault, 2005).

Self observation and surveillance of each private individual leads to an awareness of intersecting gazes rather than a single gaze. Calculated technology is subtle in its approach, infiltrating the smallest details of our lives. We are made visible and surveyed but beneath our external image our details and movements are compared and recorded then amassed in a bank of knowledge. Individuals therefore contribute to the inner workings of society rather than being separated from it.

[9] Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, or philosophical discourse, it aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines women's social roles and lived experience, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, psychoanalysis, economics, literary criticism, and philosophy. While generally providing a critique of social relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests, and issues. Themes explored in feminism include art history and contemporary art, aesthetics, discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy. (Feminist theory: Information from Answers.com (n.d.). In *Answers.com*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://www.answers.com/topic/feminist-theory)

[10] Semiotics: "The theory and study of signs and symbols, especially as elements of language or other systems of communication, and comprising semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics" (Semiotics definition. (2009). In *The Free Dictionary*. Retrieved September 9, 2009, from http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Semiotic)

Mulvey helped establish feminist film theory, the questioning of a system of pleasure geared to the gaze of male viewers, as a legitimate field of study with her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Wright, 1992). Mulvey argues in the essay that cinema viewing is the interplay between narcissistic or egotistical identification and erotic voyeurism[11].

Men filmed in action as characters in the landscape constituted figures of ego identification, like the idealized image a child first recognizes in a mirror and seeks to live up to as an ego ideal throughout its life. Mulvey borrows this theory of the mirror stage from Jacques Lacan who refers to the mirror reflection and projection of the ego as the 'other' (the imaginary other who resembles the self). The subject that looks out is full of want. The gaze is the cause of the desire that comes from outside the beholder and this gaze is negative, an 'evil eye'. The subject sees how the other sees it and internalizes the gaze resulting in a poor self-image.

For Mulvey the woman is made into the object of eroticized looking, or scopophilia[12] which has two varieties, active and fetishistic. Man has the power as the bearer of the look, woman is the image. The drive to look of the male audience reassures their integrity by removing anxiety caused by their unconscious fear of castration[13]. Once the woman is demystified, her threat exposed, the woman is devalued. The second avenue of escape is to enhance the beauty of the woman to transform her into something satisfying in itself (Mulvey, 1975). Secluded from life she is but an image for the male gaze, he has the power.

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between
> active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy[14] on

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[11] Voyeurism: "A perversion in which a person receives sexual gratification from seeing the genitalia of others or witnessing others' sexual behaviour" (Voyeurism. (n.d.). In *WordNet*. Retrieved May 28, 2009, from http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=voyeurism)

[12] Scopophilia, the drive to look is a term used by Sigmund Freud in his theory of the fetish. "Fetishism is there defined as a masculine perversion which consists in deriving sexual gratification from the association of a female sexual object with a fetish, generally an inanimate or partial object..." (Schor, N. (1992). Fetishism. In E. Wright, (Ed.), *Feminism and psychoanalysis: A critical dictionary.* (pp. 113-117). Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishers Inc.)

[13] Castration: "The fantasized fear of injury to or loss of genital organs or the unrealistic fear of loss of power or control" (Castration anxiety. (n.d.). In *Answers.com*. Retrieved May 28, 2009 from http://www.answer.com/topic /castration-complex)

[14] Phantasy is the child's response to the question, "What am I, what place do I occupy for the Other?" It involves assuming the identity of some object given a privileged value in relation to the mother, the sort of object which Anglo-Saxton psychoanalytic terminology would call "pregenital": the breast, excrement and, Lacan adds, the look or the voice. (Leader & Groves, 2000, p. 121).

to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey, 1975).

Women are displayed in film as erotic objects for fellow characters and for the spectator. She falls in love and becomes the property of the male star who controls the fantasy and emerges as the representative of power. The male spectator identifies with this more powerful ideal ego.

Briefly Mulvey believes cinema viewing is the interplay between narcissistic identification and erotic voyeurism. The woman is made into the object of eroticized looking, she is an image for the male gaze. The drive to look of the male audience restores their integrity by removing anxiety caused by a fear of castration.

Mike Parr (1945) is an Australian performance artist and printmaker born in Sydney where he now lives and works. He began making art out of an interest in problems of communication after a realisation his mode of verbalisation was visual (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006). Parr has exhibited extensively in Australia and internationally examining philosophical and political concerns that embrace the self and the wider world. He is interested in what is not possible to express, the silence of the traumatised and the absent (Helmrich, 2003). This is influenced by his personal experience of being born with a deformed arm, missing above the elbow.

The solo exhibition *Volte Face, Mike Parr Prints & Pre-Prints 1970 – 2005* included a selection of the obsessive repetitions of the Self Portrait Project. Held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, the exhibition proposed "that self portraiture is ambivalent, inherently unstable project, like identity itself. It depicts the self through distortional processes including anamorphism[15], mirroring and reversal, and literal physical disjuncture between body and head/mind" (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006). The abstract elements in the portraits show Parr's work is about mood or process and less about representation.

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[15] Anamorphism: "a distorted projection or perspective; especially an image distorted in such a way that it becomes visible only when viewed in a special manner" (Anamorphism. (n.d.). In *WordNet*. Retrieved October 6, 2009 from http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=anamorphism)

The video *100 Breaths*[16] features Parr 'wearing' etched self portraits on his face creating a temporary mask held by his breath. He 'inhales' 100 individual prints with the camera swinging in and out with each, increasingly desperate, gasp of air. Like the various prints Parr's face also changes as he hyperventilates producing an "inadvertent form of self portrait. That's the intention with the multitude of images, the schizophrenia if you like of the images, their almost uncontrollable relativism and division" (Parr, as cited in Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006). Unintentional, conflicting portraits are literally withdrawn into the self then discarded to be replaced by another split image.

The work *16 Untitled Self Portraits*[17] includes multiple drawings in fluid pencil which highlights different features and expressions on a single face. They are hung in a row and framed in black like a film strip. The portraits are not of equal size or position on the paper and the angle of the head varies but there remains a concurrent flow from the first work till the last. The detail of two portraits from *26 Untitled Self Portraits*[18] shows a much softer use of pencil where sinuous line illustrates the lose skin and contours of Parr's aging face. They show two different expressions, a head slightly turned away with pale, inward looking eyes that seem to question the self while the other shows darkened eyes that gaze outward from a more resigned face. I find the first a more ghostly and unnerving image yet more compelling to view, there is strength in the non definable content.

Parr is a reader of psychoanalytic theory including the works of Lacan and Foucault. Regarding Lacan, Parr refers to the "relativism and division" in his multitude of self portraits, images originally formed by a fragmented view in the mirror further affected by his missing limb. This division could refer to identifying with an image outside himself, the illusory other. Parr's catalogue essay for the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art exhibition, *Photo(graphed)* was derived from Lacan's writings describing the way the image looks back at the viewer.

> I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside. I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture.
> This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive

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[16] Refer Appendices 1, Image 1.

[17] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 2.

[18] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 3.

its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which – if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do in a fragmented form – I am *photo-graphed.* (Lacan, as cited in Bromfield, 1991, p. 268).

The outside gaze creates Lacan's visibility. Lacan's account of vision allows drawings to exist as independent, vigorous devices of vision rather than simple inactive pictures (Bromfield, 1991).

I gaze into myself as one gazes into a crystal ball. It is a fluidity that is fixed (determined and a fixity (obsession) that is fluid (since it runs over itself, unlocking the secret narcissism of vision, one that since the Renaissance would immortalize itself through the conventions of an 'objective' representation) (objectivity equals imposition of authorial narcissism) and an ideological scientism, the reflected mirror-image of self ('the method' as fetish!) A-MUCK SCIENCE (EVERY LINE A WEB)... QUESTIONS OF LINE DELINEATE MY SUBJECTIVITY OBJECTIVELY (SELF-EVIDENT). I DRAW 'THE LINE' (BETWEEN SUBJECT/OBJECT RELATIONS) I 'DRAW ON' THE AUDIENCE. I 'DRAW OUT' THE PROCESS OF SEEING (VISUALY, COMPOS MENTIS) I 'DRAW OUT' THE AUDIENCE (ATTENUATE THE PROCESS OF SEEING INTEGRAL TO THE PROCESS OF FEELING)... (Parr, as citied in Bromfield, 1991, p. 268).

Here we see Parr reflecting on Lacan. Through his drawing Parr attempts to break the return of the gaze to expose its structure. He avidly describes ways his drawing process relates to the audience, wanting to reveal to them that although the portraits begin as a reflected mirror image, "they are subject to the gaze of his work" (Bromfield, 1991, p.268).

As with Foucault, Parr is also concerned with power over and within the body through political concerns of the self and society and the traumatised other, those imprisoned on the edge of society. By repetitively drawing his portrait in multiple ways he represents a collective group and through self surveillance he draws himself caught in a web of intersecting gazes.

I am interested in the gaze and link this to surveillance where the body and the face is under conscious and permanent visibility. In a self portrait the gaze is one of self surveillance, comparing or identifying with other images, the idealised ways of looking and presenting ourselves to the world influenced by the gaze of others.

Our sense of self, who we are or want to be, is informed by our life experiences and the aspirations we have for ourselves. The style of my portraits reflect my tentative and enclosed self. They are a personal exploration of my identity and how it evolves through life experience

from the profoundly effecting to the everyday. The overlaid tracing paper alludes to continuous change, the interplay between the seen and the unseen, the revealed and the obscured and how people and memories are erased and my 'view' is unclear.

My installation involves two parts, a series of pencil drawings on paper and a video playing on black and white surveillance monitors. The seven drawings titled *Breathe*[19] are a series of self portraits where my face gradually reveals, subtly changes expression and dissipates. By attaching a sheet of tracing paper the portraits appear to inhale and exhale, the movement introduces an element of chance as it floats above, effectively erasing the drawing or sits against it, revealing the image.

In *Breathe*[20] I have drawn glimpses of myself on a repetitive search for wholeness where unity of the self is unresolved. I am demonstrating a captivation with my own image fuelled by an ego based on misrecognition with the overlaid paper impeding my view so clarity for myself and the viewer is illusive. I am ultimately viewing myself from outside, from where others may see me relating to myself as if to another, I internalize the gaze. I am also aware that I am being seen by others (the viewers) and I must desire to be thought of in a certain way. It appears that truth or completeness cannot be found in a fragmented reflection that creates an illusory self or in images that after all, are two dimensional representations. There are parallels here with Lacan and Parr's explorations of the self.

Parr's experience as a performance artist reveals an interest in self presence which seems to flow through to a physical approach to the drawing surface. Parr's portraits illustrate a search for a self which is inherently lost (Coulter-Smith & Magon, n.d.). Like the unknowable audience response to a Parr performance piece I leave the viewer to interact with the overlaid paper, will their curiosity cause them to blow on it to bring the submerged image into focus?

I also share with Parr the use of similar mediums and methods of display, using pencil and mesmerising black and white video to render the self partially visible and arranging portraits like a film strip[21]. Pencil leaves a linear trace of our different psychological states at times viewed internally or by creating a more external gaze by darkening the eyes. Through repeating

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[19] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 4.

[20] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 4.

[21] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 5.

portraits of similar small sizes on separate sheets of paper and hanging them in a row creates a filmic effect suggesting the sequence is part of a continuous narrative.

The artist Kiki Smith (1954) was born in Germany and raised in New Jersey, America. Exploring primarily printmaking and sculpture using delicate and apparently fragile, non high art materials, Smith reflects the subjects of gender, representation and the self. She investigates the differing ways life can be an indestructible and powerful force but also frail, that death is inevitable.

Smith's work is partly psychological for its self-healing and investigates one's feelings or relationship with the body but she also uses the physical body to show the numerous functions that vie to control it. She wants people to examine philosophies and ideologies that own and control us in all aspects of our life. "The body is our common denominator and the stage for our pleasures and our sorrows. I want to express through it who we are, how we live and die" (Smith, as cited in Grosenick, 2001, p. 502).

In *Untitled (Self-Portraits)*[22] repetition and ghostly effects abound as Smith's haunting stare gives a sense of bleakness and loss (Weitman, 2003). A single drawing has been resized, fractured and faded and repeated on four sheets of paper which are joined to create a haphazard jigsaw puzzle. This disjointed work is unsettling for the eye and because of its desolate content. Smith also explores repetition in *All Souls*[23] giving strength to a found image of a fragile foetus, on thirty six sheets of handmade paper. The nature of printmaking allows for this repetition. Likewise we have a standard-issue human body but are also very diverse, each possessing a unique soul according to Smith, a Catholic (Weitman, 2003).

With the work *Two*[24], heads appear that on first glance look like carbon copies of each other. Drawn in precise detail with each hair depicted, the chests disappear into the surface of the paper giving the linear portraits a mask-like, ghostly effect. The upper portrait is traced from a photograph, the other is freehand and differences can be seen on closer inspection. The eyes are slightly open on the lower portrait indicating that the heads possibly represent awake and dream states or life and death. Smith comments:

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[22] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 6.

[23] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 7.

[24] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 8.

In making work that's about the body, playing with the indestructibility of life, where life is this ferocious force that keeps propelling us; at the same time, it's also about how you can just pierce it and it dies. I'm always playing between these two extremes about life. (Smith, as cited in McCormick, 1991).

Smith is explaining why she enjoys making paper objects that have a fragile quality as it reflects the delicate nature of life, our mortality that exists alongside the compelling energy of life. With her drawings the strength and fragility of life is approached conceptually and aesthetically. This inherent contradiction is also reflected in the use of archival paper giving her work a non apparent robustness.

Smith relentlessly explores images of the self. Revelling in making herself look horrific is acknowledgement that her ego image is not ideal and the repeated portraits illustrates a search for wholeness. Her floating heads shows a subject that is never unified. In doing so Smith reflects Lacanian theory.

As with Foucault, Smith has an interest in prisons and systems of repression (which links to the feminist theories of Mulvey). In an interview with McCormick (1991) concerning the question of the impact of feminism on peoples' perceptions of the body, Smith replies: "Yes, definitely, in terms of people's consciousness about ownership of the body as well as a lot of things concerning reclaiming the body from patriarchy, medicine, religion, or any other form of institutionalized repression". Smith's point of view is that as a result of feminist critique, people are now more in tune with their physical body and are aware of manipulative external forces, such as male domination, the male gaze and wider authoritarianism which may be viewed as inherent flaws in our social systems.

Smith is concerned with the extremes of life and media process and we both enjoy the delicate quality of paper. I am acutely aware of the fragility of life, that strong people both in body and mind can be suddenly invaded by disease that causes them to die after having nursed both of my parents as they battled and lost their lives to cancer. These raw memories I cannot escape so it influences my decisions and pervades my art and results in works that carry torment and sadness. I use direct and personal methods and my drawing style is delicate and feminine so the medium reflects the female subject and part of the message that life is fragile. I use pencil to build up a series of fine lines and tones, so my images do not have the immediate impact as a large expressive painting might. Therefore there has to be strength in the quality of mark

making, the composition and most importantly the interpretation of the subject which the body fulfils.

Marcel Odenbach (1953) is a German artist who probes personal identity in his video work by dealing with the effect on the individual of social and political issues. Interested in problems of vision and perception he uses the camera like a human eye looking out for clues to self understanding (Rush, 2003).

The provocative video *Die Distanz zwischen mir und meinen Verlusten (The Distance Between Myself and My Losses)*[25] locates the formation of self and identity in the realm of vision. Attaching black tape onto the viewing image so only a small slit is visible Odenbach distances the viewer while making it appear they are gazing into private, forbidden territory. "Odenbach positions identity in a tense relation to history, culture and sexuality, where the self is only partially visible and partially knowable" (Electronic Arts Intermix, n.d.).

Filmed on location in Paris the video *Dans la vision peripherique due temoin (In the peripheral vision of the witness)*[26] combines theatrical performance, everyday life, philosophical dialogue and Hollywood film scenes. The video is an "inquiry into the psychological and cultural apparatus of vision – seeing and being seen, voyeurism and narcissism, the gaze and the self" (Electronic Arts Intermix, n.d.). The imagery is shown simultaneously on a screen divided into three panels. Showing these scenes partially concealed adjusts the structure of the final image and by including views of himself in the role of a witness or voyeur, Odenbach draws attention to the gaze of the viewer (Cameron, 1998).

Auf den fahrenden Zug springen (To Jump on a Moving Train)[27] is shown on six identical monitors arranged on plinths to form a right angle (which references the movement of a train along a set of tracks). Early documentary footage combined with the title "...confronts history as a moving stage of images and events that precedes our existence, continues after we are gone, and never slows down long enough for us to determine our present location" (Cameron, 1998, p. 15).

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[25] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 9.

[26] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 10.

[27] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 11.

Odenbach disrupts the gaze to explore themes of narcissism, the self and the other. The social body and his role within it, is portrayed as a constant search for understanding or wholeness. By obscuring the view answers to this search cannot be revealed. He appears caught in the initial mirror reflection of fragmentation and insufficiency but never achieves even an illusory unity. In this way Odenbach's work reflects Lacan's theories regarding narcissism, the fragmented self and a self without unity.

Odenbach desires his viewers to recognise that being aware of the political structure of everyday life is necessary in understanding history and power. As with Foucault he strives to expose the subliminal use of power, making it visible to those beneficiaries unaware of an imbalance by challenging cultural and social priorities. Cameron (1998) writes:

> (...) Odenbach's art finds its deepest resonance in uncovering the hidden nature of power: how it is practiced unthinkingly, the way its symbols permeate social behaviour, and the degree to which its significance is minimized by those who are its most ardent practitioners. (p. 15).

Continuum[28] is a video of myself naked and revolving in the presence of a looming shadow, my arms protectively containing what is kept private, alluding to documentary film and surveillance footage where the figure is exposed and subject to an unseen gaze. The DVD[29] is looped, repeated on four screens and is void of sound, the viewer becomes conscious of being the silent observer, the feeling heightened as they circuit the monitors. These are suspended above the viewer, at a height surveillance cameras are found or advertising screens that bombard customers with images are positioned so their products can be seen uninterrupted and as widely as possible. The viewer is forced to tilt their head upwards to view the video, further exposing their act of gazing.

I considered the panoptic model while filming my video and incorporated themes of surveillance and the gaze. Foucault (1995) explains the architecture of Bentham's Panopticon:

> By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.

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[28] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 12.

[29] Refer to Appendices 2, DVD.

Using video as the medium I allude to private eye observation and modern surveillance footage. The shadows are strong as I am illuminated by a single 'search light'. The shadows are my only company, I am alone and isolated as if on a stage and visible for all those who wish to view.

Odenbach is an influence due to his interest in self identity, vision and surveillance. "For Odenbach, identity is defined in the elusive realm of vision – seeing and being seen" (Marcel Odenbach: Biography, n.d.). In *Die Distanz zwischen mir und meinen Verlusten (The Distance Between Myself and My Losses)*[30] he masks the screen with bands of black, allowing partially blocked vision. As with Odenbach's approach, my video alludes to surveillance and voyeurism where the figure is exposed and subject to an unseen gaze as in surveillance camera footage. Shown on black and white surveillance monitors with no sound the viewer becomes conscious of being the silent observer, their voyeuristic tendencies are exposed.

I enjoy the sculptural elements of Odenbach's use of video monitors in *Auf den fahrenden Zug springen (To Jump on a Moving Train)*[31]. The plinths housing the screens are like wardens dressed in black or Panopticon towers, this image influenced me to consider the position of the surveillance monitors and having multiple screens showing *Continuum*[32]. The constant movement of the train is like my never ending spin, the continuous rhythmic journey that, although slow, never stops for glimpses of clarity or arrives at a solution.

Foucault discusses omnipresent power over an individual body. I am focusing on a single body, my own. I am not governed by a specific power but at the moment I feel that what defines me is the presence of memory, being haunted by loss. I depict myself alone but include looming shadows (my own) which suggests an ever-present (possibly spiritual) force that suppresses me. I am primarily my own observer. I am naked and partially exposed allowing observation and the space that surrounds me is undefined. This ambiguity allows the viewer to imagine my story, where I am and where I should be. I am shown from all angles, allowing an uninterrupted surveillance. I effectively surrender some of my power to unseen forces.

With complicity I explore self surveillance when alone and when visible and subject to the gaze. Visual phenomena is everywhere and infiltrates many parts of our lives. Many choose to

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[30] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 9.

[31] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 11.

[32] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 12.

share personal information and images (online for example) and we assume we have control over with whom it is shared and take responsibility for what is available. We invite the surveillance of others even into the privacy of our own homes. Due to our constant exposure we survey ourselves and consider how we are seen by others. *Continuum*[33] invites the gaze as I am naked, my pose non-confrontational but I also reference being the subject of my own subjection and objectification.

Foucault also discusses a society of surveillance in a more positive way. The forces behind this society are based on power over the control of knowledge, exchange and communication but it seems the observation of individuals is necessary and important, becoming a resource to support wider society. My self-portraits are a statement on my current situation, I am not a controlling force, rather an individual on a vague search for answers. I picture myself involved in this search, revolving like the continuum of life, reminiscent of a cog in the wheel of the panoptic machine.

Considering the writings of Mulvey, there are a mixture of negative and positive associations related to the gaze and how it influences the audience and myself when creating my art work. The conundrum with the gaze is whether to indulge in its pleasure, revelling in the ardent look or to feel it's negative effects, feel guilt in viewing an unclothed figure, shame in being watched watching by someone else in the gallery, the movie theatre or on the street (although the appeal of being a voyeur is partly in the risk of being exposed). I am in a way exploiting the relationship between public associations with the gaze to the actual viewing of my work to heighten audience analysis as the gaze is seemingly inescapable in our adult lives, it involves the physical act of looking with our imagination. I am both subjected to and allow myself to be the subject of the gaze.

I am the sole actor and producer who created a film as part of a body of artwork to be viewed by a handful of people, a world away from the Hollywood cinema Mulvey critiqued. I am a heroine without the hero that the male audience needs to identify with. Likewise though, I show an image of a woman with an indefinable background of mysterious shadows. Presenting myself as hiding my body as though punished, devalued by an unseen force, there should be no need for active scopophilia. But I allow the fetishistic drive to look as I am a small image on a screen separated from the audience, the view of my private world inviting their voyeurism. The looped video showing myself continuously spinning is a comment on the timeless image of

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[33] Refer to Appendices 1, Image 12.

women, but this repetition dulls the erotic power of the image destabilising the effortless viewing by the bearer of the gaze.

To conclude: I am a visual artist exploring self portraiture through drawing and video. In this body of work I looked to the mirror to map the gaze of who I am and of how I am seen. I have considered the consequence of my reflection, surveillance and the voyeuristic gaze and my complicity in it in the context of the writings of Lacan, Foucault and Mulvey. I have found similarities with the drawing processes and methodologies of Mike Parr and Kiki Smith. In unique ways we have all produced artworks that include psychological self portraits. I have discovered similar concerns of vision and surveillance with Marcel Odenbach and drawn parallels with his video work and installations and my own practice. Collectively our artwork is concerned with self identity and is evidence of an elusive search for wholeness fuelled by a deceptive ego in the presence of the gaze whether it be reflected and fragmented, seen or unseen, revealed or obscured.

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Appendices 1

Images

Image 1

Parr, Mike (Artist). (2003). *100 Breaths* (Still) [DVD]. 7:23 minutes, looped. Collection of University of Queensland Art Museum. [Online image] 8 September 2009. http://www.mca.com.au/default.asp?page_id=10&content_id=1917

Image 2

Parr, Mike (Artist). (1981-1985). *16 Untitled self portraits* [Drawing]. Pencil on typing paper, 16 framed works: each 29.5 x 21.0cm sheet; 39.5 x 31.0 x 3.0cm frame. Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. [Online image] 9 September 2009. http://collection.artgallery. nsw.gov.au/collection/search.do;jsessionid=A89FC4DD4A5773923EF2368D9F9E61CE? keyword-0=PLETTER&sort=user_sym_34&browse=contemporary%2Faustralian %2Fbrowse&field-0=user_sym_39&bool-0=AND&images=true&field-1=user_sym_41&bool-1= AND&dept= contemporary%2Faustralian&field-2=user_sym_41&bool-2=AND&value-1=Australian +Art%2FContemporary

Image 3

Parr, Mike (Artist). (1981-1996). *26 Untitled self portraits* (Detail) [Drawing]. Pencil on paper, 82.5 x 62.5 x 4.2cm each. Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. [Online image] 9 September 2009. http://collection.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/results.do?keyword-0=Mike +Parr&field 0=simpleSearchObject&view=label&searchMode=simple&pos=1

Image 4

Davies, Rebecca (Artist). (2009). *Breathe* (Detail) [Drawing]. Pencil on paper, 37.5 x 29cm each.

Image 5

Davies, Rebecca (Artist). (2009). *Breathe* (Installation view) [Drawing]. Pencil on paper, 37.5 x 29cm each.

Parr, Mike (Artist). (1981-1985). *16 Untitled self portraits* (Installation view) [Drawing]. Pencil on typing paper, 16 framed works: each 29.5 x 21.0cm sheet; 39.5 x 31.0 x 3.0cm frame. Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. [Online image] 9 September 2009. http://collection.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/search.do;jsessionid=A89FC4DD4A5773923EE2368D9F9E61CE?keyword0=PLETTER&sort=user_sym_34&browse=contemporary%2FaustraliFa%2Fbrowse&field-0=user_sym_39&bool-0=AND&images=true&field1=user_sym_41&bool1=AND&dept=contemporary%2Faustralian&field-2=user_sym_41&bool-2=AND&value1=Australian+Art%2FContemporary
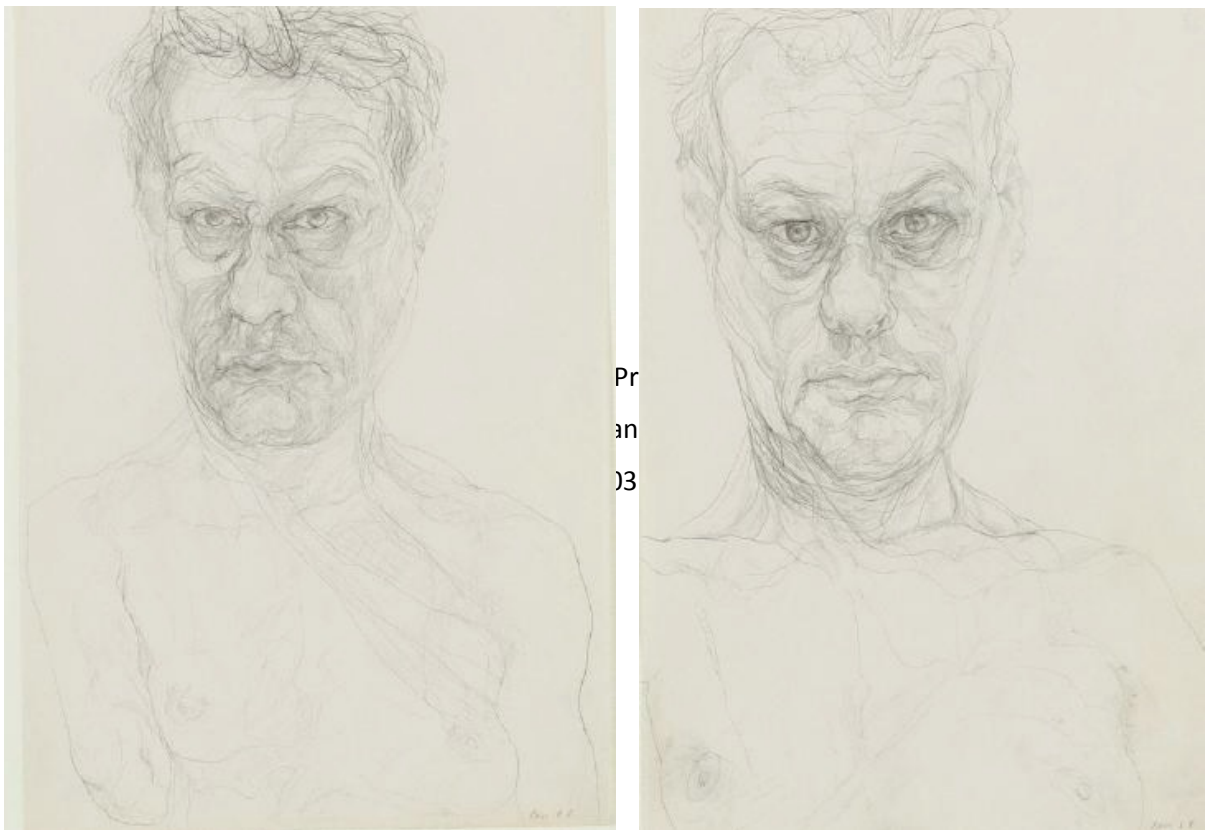
Image 6

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Image 7

Smith, Kiki (Artist). (1988). *All Souls* [Screenprint]. Screenprint on thirty-six attached sheets of
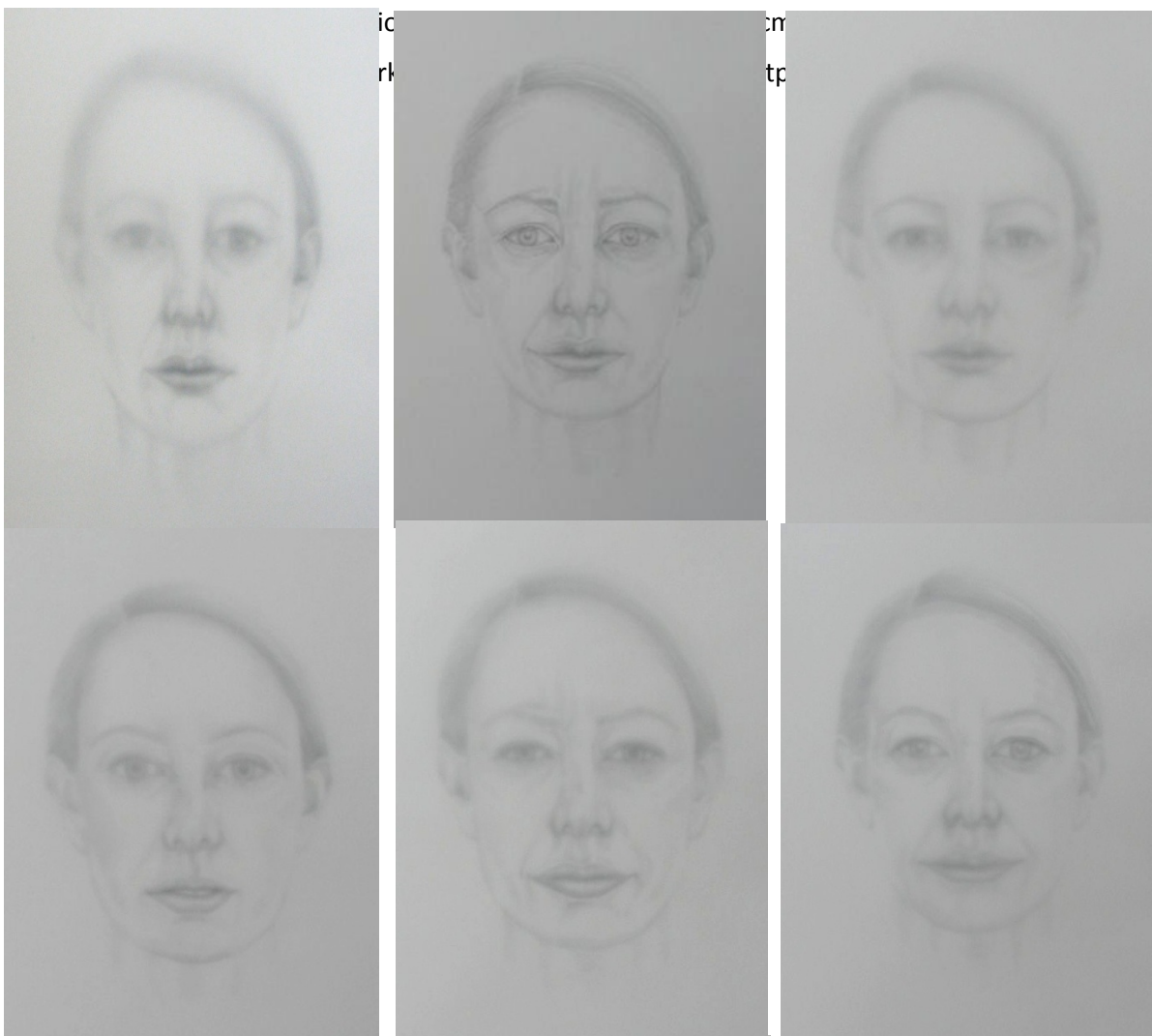

Image 8

Smith, Kiki (Artist). (2002). *Two* [Print]. Etching and sanding on mould-made Hahnemuhle paper. Plate 96.5 x 76.2 cm, sheet 114.3 x 88.9 cm. Weitman, W. (2003). *Kiki Smith: Prints,*

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Image 10

Odenbach, M. (1984). *Dans la vision peripherique du temoin (In the peripheral vision of the witness)* [Video]. 13:33 minutes, black and white and colour, sound. [Online image] 8 September 2009. http://www.eai.org/eai/searchResults.htm?searchInput=marcel+odenbach

Image 11

Odenbach, M. (1989-91). *Auf den fahrenden Zug springen (To Jump on a Moving Train)* (Installation view) [Video]. Cameron, D. (1998). *Marcel Odenbach*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art.
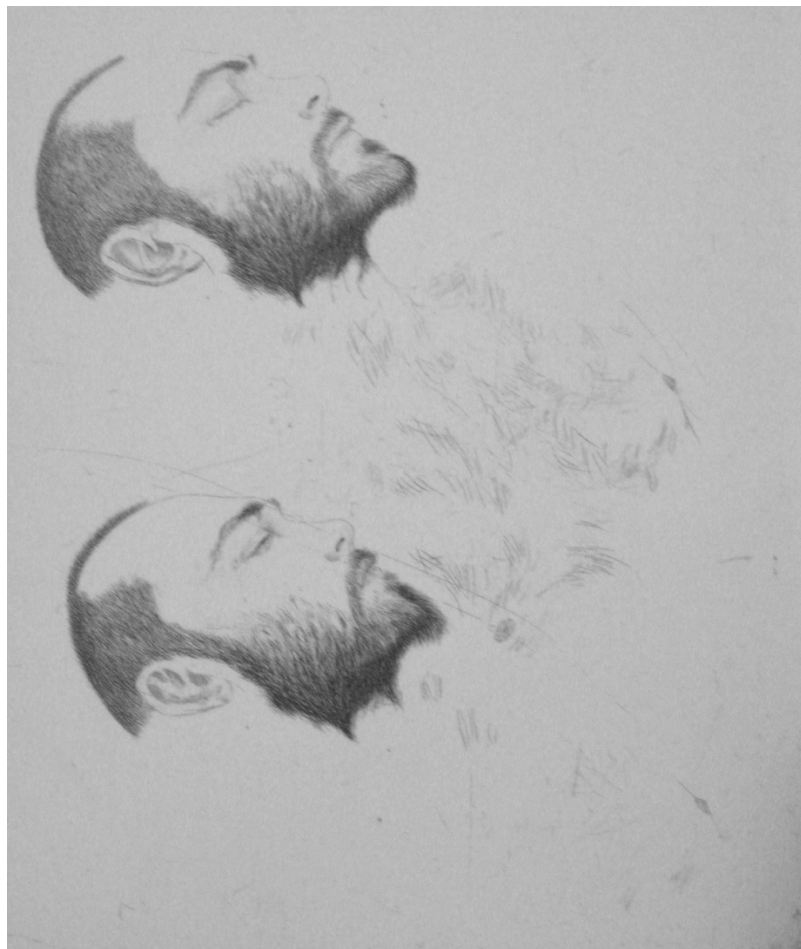
Image 12

Davies, Rebecca (Artist). (2009). *Continuum* (Stills) [DVD]. 6:29 minutes, looped.

Appendices 2

DVD

Davies, Rebecca (Artist). (2009). *Continuum* [DVD]. 6:29 minutes.

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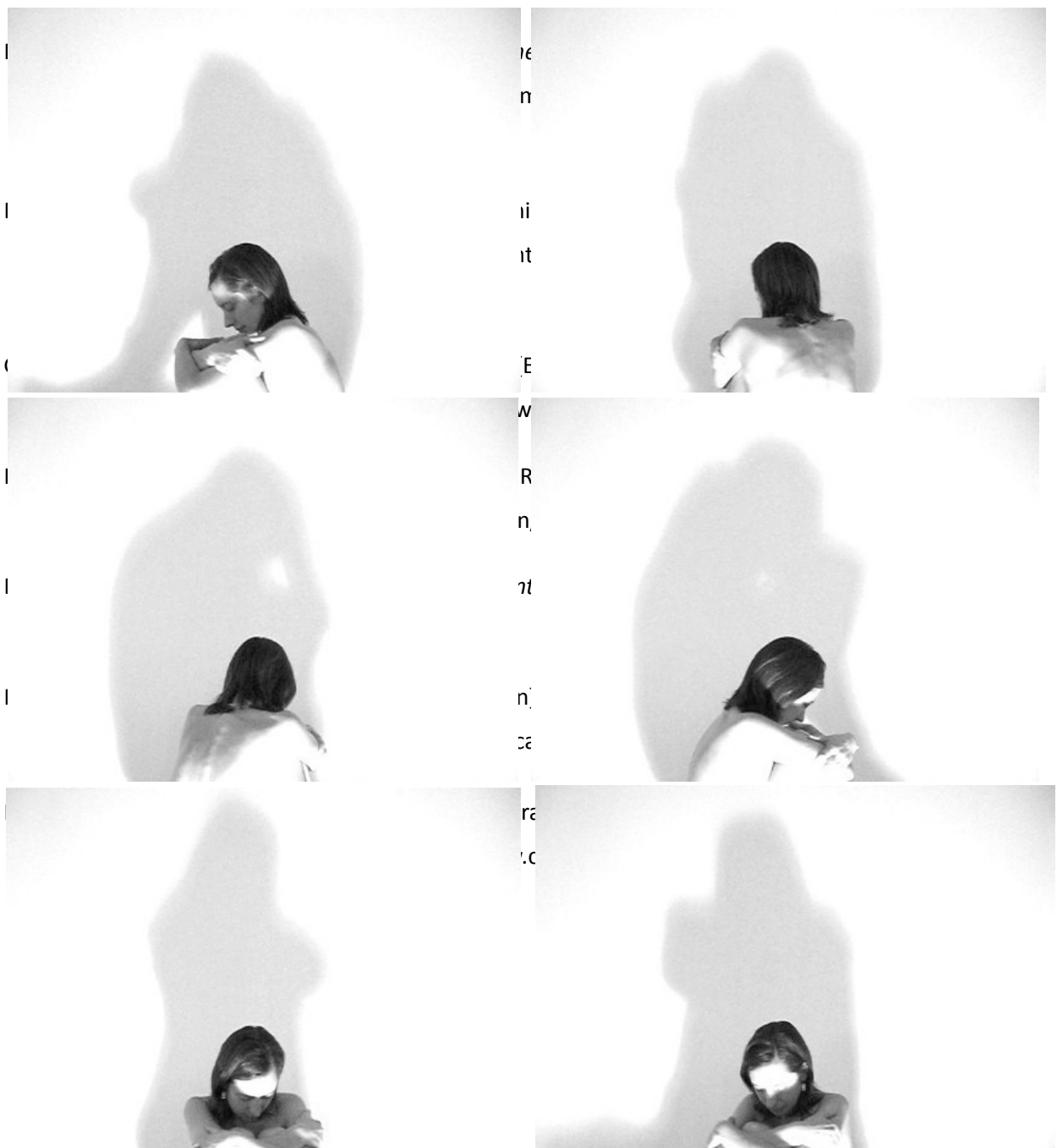
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