the indeterminate precision of narrative

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the indeterminate precision of narrative

thesis statement
by
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This document is submitted in partial completion of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at Southern Cross University, NSW, 2008.
Statement of Sources

I declared that the work presented in this thesis statement, to the best of my knowledge and belief, is original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at any other university.

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lyndall adams
Abstract

The indeterminate precision of narrative is the culmination of multiple exhibitions that engage with the uncertain, unfixed and yet simultaneously accurate and truthful nature of storytelling. There is no single narrative that explains our historic present. To tell a story is to re-tell stories from the past in order to create coherent narratives in the present. The narrative structures the exhibitions enquire into focus on images and objects that speak to the body in hybrid forms. The significance of the research lies in its response to and engagement with contemporary theoretical debates that currently surround images of the body. By enacting the text of everyday life, the body becomes not a product but a processor of everyday life. The research conducted made use of traditional and contemporary image making tools such as oil painting interfaced with embedded plexiglass imagery sourced through digital means and includes the design and development of a website that publishes the research outcomes. The research advances our general knowledge in the innovative use of materials that speak to conventional and contemporary accounts of the body.

Arts-practice-led research was the methodology identified for use in the research and involved a process of information gathering; including non-linear systems that are inclusive, chaotic, and holistic. Various visual and multi-media methods of selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication including journals, digital photographs, proofs and drafts were engaged in. Arts-practice-led research is pluralistic in approach; uses multi-method techniques tailored to the individual project; reflexivity is acknowledged and the interaction of the researcher with research material is recognised. Within this field the researcher reflects-in-action and reflects-on-action and is adaptive. These systems explored how my ontological position and the methodologies outlined were catalysts for studio production.

The aim of the research considers how this methodology impacts on the lived body that is determined and specific. The narrator of the stories I tell must be conceived not just as a personal presence but also as a form of action that operates at a level fundamentally contradictory to the action of the story. This action is identified as performative. The narrative act has a status independent not just of the content of the telling (story and characters), but of any final meaning of the story. The association of the latter with “the author” is nowadays considered naïve; but it is in fact no less naïve to associate such meaning with “the narrator”. What we have traditionally called the narrator is not a fixed entity capable of dictating a determinant meaning but is the discourse produced by the act of narrating, a discourse which makes meaning and cannot specify it. The narrator is not assigned an “author function” that separates itself from the text in order to force conformity on it. If this were the case, the progress of the multiplicity (rhizomic in structure) of discourse would come to a stop and in so doing assign to the story a non-performative status. The narrator is that multiplicity or act performed. This refers to both studio process and installation space.
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introduction

The exhibition *the indeterminate precision of narrative* is the result of numerous research publications that investigate the tentative, flexible though concurrently exact and frank qualities of storytelling. This is not a single narrative as there is no single narrative that can explain our historic present. To tell a story is to retell stories from the past in order to create coherent narratives in the present. The narrative structures that the research publications enquire into focus on images and objects that speak to the body in hybrid forms. The aim of the research is to respond to complex narrative structures role in positioning visual images of the body.

The significance of the research lies in its response to and engagement with contemporary theoretic debates that currently surround images and narratives of the body. By *enacting the text of everyday life*, the body becomes not a product but a processor of everyday life. The research conducted made use of traditional and contemporary image making tools such as oil painting interfaced with embedded plexiglass imagery sourced though digital means. While the innovative use of materials advances our general knowledge in the area of new media they also speak to conventional and contemporary accounts of the body.

Chapter 1, *terms of reference* presents the background for a number of contemporary theoretical debates that have contributed to my arts-practice-led research. Theoreticians and contemporary artists are discussed in light of the diversity of contemporary interest in the theorisation of the body. No essential theme encompasses all of these practices and theorists in some kind of ‘grand narrative’ of the body. They all play a part in different ways and for various purposes in repositioning established thinking of the body as a coherent and unified entity. We need to understand not only how culture inscribes bodies but also what these bodies are that makes inscription possible. What is it in the nature of bodies that opens them up to political, cultural and conceptual evolution?

My enquiry relates to feminist philosophic work that explores beyond mind-body dualism to suggest a logic beyond representation, a logic beyond the mirroring. I want to suggest that there might be strategies which move in that direction and that these strategies would mean that subjects, in their difference, might take place as processes rather than as objects. The question of how useful is it to think of myself as an artist in terms of “feminisms” is explored (given that “feminism” itself can be a dangerously mocking phrase that at once categorises and circumscribe an audience’s expectation) and has motivated much of my recent research. The influence of an interface between post-structuralist and feminist thinking has filtered through much art-practice and debate, especially in the last decade. This led to a problematisation of representation itself and some absolute stances in relation to it, for example, in the case of Mary Kelly who refuses to depict the female form in her work as being an image that is too ideologically over-determined.

A similar set of problems are found in theoretical debates, which attempt to address patriarchal, or phallocentric oppression. This is the double bind of a deconstructive critique: how is it possible to undermine phallocentric representation without resorting to the
languages and logics of the very structures that one wishes to overturn? The difficulty with certain aspects of post-structuralist thinking is that language is, at times, over-determined as the source of understanding gendered subject positions and their meanings.

Chapter 2, *the impact of serendipity* teases out methodologies applied by arts-practice-led research. Methodologies engaged by arts-practice-led research involve a process of information gathering: including non-linear systems that are inclusive, chaotic, and holistic. Various visual and multi-media methods of selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication including; journals, digital photographs, proofs and drafts are engaged under the paradigm of performative research. Arts-practice-led research is pluralistic in approach; uses multi-method techniques tailored to the individual project; reflexivity is acknowledged and the interaction of the researcher with research material is recognised. This chapter elaborates on these systems and explores how my ontological position and the methodologies outlined are catalysts for studio production.

Chapter 3, *the lived body* expands on the impact of the lived body on arts-practice-led research. My arts-practice attempts to articulate the female body, the lived body that is determined and specific. It speaks of tension between the transcendent and the corporeal, between the available tools of arts-practice and the desire to present the lived body in all of its specificity. I locate that specificity in the performative aspects of painting as tracing our bodies in the world; the performance of making; my emersion in the process of making and the integration of issues surrounding embodiment.

In this chapter, feminist cultural critics and artists are discussed in relation to phenomenology and particularly the writings of Merleau-Ponty, in order to explore issues of embodiment, tactility and the relations of being in the world. Performative research is definition as a material form of practice. Materiality, on the other hand, is the insistence of the medium within the operation of the work’s meaning. It is the operation of matter that causes the disruption of the traditional categories of interpretation. Materiality produces the means by which visual language and visual narrative are disrupted.

The epistemological implications for the process of making are outlined separately in chapters 4 & 5 under the disciplines of painting, drawing, printmaking and web design. This separation is for convenience and the logic of writing only and should not be read as any hierarchical ranking on my part. I mark the boundaries between disciplines as false. The material thinking associated with making is conflated. I hope that the viewer arrives not at any particular medium but at continual mediation between: mediums, images, content, concepts and anticipates the different narrative imperatives, spatially fusing the materials.

Chapter 4, *the indeterminate precision of narrative* discussed the multiple exhibitions/research publications that have emerged as artefacts/objects of the research. The narrative structures the exhibitions/research publications enquire into focus on images and objects that speak to the body in hybrid forms. The research for my master thesis *not so blind reverence* focused on dialogic imperatives. Narrative structures were defined as rhizomic in structure I concluded, connected in all ways but always and/both, becoming, never arriving. The research since then has continued on this meandering path of becoming. If becoming and unpacking

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are joined then we are constantly unpacking. The image this conjures is one of a constant Diaspora, constantly moving and changing. This thesis looks at points along the way, marking moments in a constantly moving stream that is rhizomic in structure, multiple in direction, assigning to the story a performative status. The narrator is that multiplicity or act performed in both studio process and installation space.

This chapter also relates the development of the imagery using family snap shots, which were digitally manipulation and cropped. The processes were developed during the research period through small collage preliminary works that were scanned into digital files, manipulated and projected at a larger scale onto prepared grounds. The techniques developed in the studio through this process were between images, materials and performative processes and elaborates on the narratives of studio production.

Chapter 5, *packaging technologies and potentials* discusses the sequential development of the digital prints and the website lyndalladams.com as integral element within my arts-practice-led research. The research methodology associated with this area necessitates the interaction of the researcher with collaborating industry partners. *lyndalladams.com* focuses on the world-wide-web as a marker that explores rhizomic story telling structures at work allowing characters to migrate, change identities, and communicate.

The questions I asked of this facet of the research initially involved producing a digital gallery that could alter the way research publications/exhibitions were experienced, appreciated and understood. The outcome of this element of research is the web site http://www.lyndalladams.com/.
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terms of reference

influences

This chapter introduces some of the contemporary theoretical debates that currently surround imaging the body that have contributed to my arts-practice-led research on an applied and conceptual level. Authors such as Elizabeth Grosz, Marsha Meskimmon, Barbara Bolt, Rosemary Betterton and Hal Foster have had a significant impact while a list of artists that have influenced this area of the research would include; Louise Bourgeois, Barbara Kruger, Tracey Emin, Cindy Sherman and Mary Kelly. The terms of reference introduced in this chapter encompass feminisms, painting and self-portraiture and considers the notion of what might come after postmodernism as a ‘living-on’.

feminisms

My practice attempts to articulate the female body, the lived body which is neither a-cultural nor a-historical, but rather determined and specific. It speaks of tensions between the sublime and the corporeal, between the available tools of artistic practice and the desire to (re)present women’s specificity. My research acknowledges the gendered nature of experience and identity, giving due credit to the cultural and theoretical writing and contemporary art of the past twenty years. The terms of reference, this chapter discusses attempts to draw its strength from this writing and art of the past without repeating its mistakes while focusing on my own experiences of the non-idealised human body.

The sources of contemporary interest in the theorisation of the body are disparate. Some artists are exploring bodily inscriptions and social makers while others are examining the reconceptualisation of the body under the influence of information technologies. No essential theme encompasses all of these practices and theorists in some kind of ‘grand narrative’ of the body. They are all factors in different ways and for various purposes to repositioning established thinking of the body as a coherent and unified entity, classified and prescribed by a series of hierarchical dualisms.

… instead we are presented with a polymorphous body, which explores the boundaries of gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age, and the interfaces between humans and machines. Bodies are lived in. They bare scares. They age. They secrete. Bodies are polymorphous. Because of the fluid nature of the social reality in which it exists and functions, the polymorphous body is obliged to engage in this exploration.

It is just as important that the significant and complex differences between women, and not just between women and men, are

3 Artists of note that have informed this area of the research include Julie Rrap, Orlan, Sophie Calle, Yayoi Kusama, Tracey Moffatt, Kiki Smith, Janine Antoni, Lisa Ryan, Cindy Sherman, Helen Chadwick, Georgina Starr, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Lucy Gunning and Sam Taylor Wood.
5 Ibid.
acknowledged and made to signify. Griselda Pollock wrote: “If we use that term women of artists, we differentiate the history of art by proposing artists and, ‘women artists’. We invite ourselves to assume a difference, which all too easily makes us presume that we know what it is.”6 Taking note of that advice - not to assume a difference does not imply that difference is irrelevant or unable to be articulated. If we ask ‘what is a woman artist’ or ‘what is women’s art’, or define women artists as a homogenous cohort we fall back into the logic of objectification and marginality? However, if we enquire into how women’s art comes to articulate sexual difference in its material specifics and at its particular historical place, the potential to generate new answers, ideas and concepts is endless.

To seek in women’s art some monolithic ‘female essence’, prior to their specific practices as their knowable ‘origin point’, erases differences between women and reinstates that exclusionary paradigm which rendered female subjectivity invisible, illegible and impossible to articulate. By moving beyond that logic, we begin to engage with sexual difference and interrogate traditional methods of historical enquiry, the nature of the artist, concepts of authorship, intentionality and the very definition of ‘art’. Why is it that definitions predictably resort to ‘women artists’ and ‘women’s art’ as a marginalised category of ‘other’ and so relegated outside of that normative group ‘artist’? Such reductive simplicity is inadequate to contain the complexities of contemporary arts-practice by women. Consequently, I resist the label “feminist arts-practice” as I believe we have to move beyond difference and become radically anti-essentialist, in order to dismantle the sterile opposition between equality and difference. When we attempt to get beyond the terms of that argument, we find that all we have is a paradoxical relationship to the goals of feminism in that there is a fundamental opposition between equality and difference to start with. Illogically the analysis is based on that opposition. In this context we are talking about the opposite of equality which is not difference, but inequality. The opposition does not work. We need to frame the whole thing differently. We need to look at this opposition and change it, by coming up with another way of describing feminism. This is crucial if we are to keep a strong feminist tradition alive both in the intellectual world and in the academy because that is in no way guaranteed.

One strategy that has some bearing on this rethinking is the exploration of life as a fundamental feminist political concern because feminists interested in the relations between subjectivity, politics and culture, need to have a more nuanced, intricate account of the body’s immersion and participation in the world if they are to develop political strategies to transform the social regulation of bodies. We need to understand not only how culture inscribes bodies but what these bodies are, that makes inscription possible. What is it in the nature of bodies that opens them up to cultural transcription, social immersion and production, that is, to political, cultural and conceptual evolution?9

The significance of such thinking resides in a double play between materiality and agency. This relies on the specific corporeality of subjects and works in conjunction with their historic location and material presence in the world, and neither dismissed as irrelevant nor reified as the essential origin of their meaning. Corporeal specificity is, instead, implicated in relations, processes and practices

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through which matter becomes meaningful. The interrelationship between an artist and a work is therefore both materially situated and in process, and an effect of action in the world.

The question this elicits is just what sort of subjectivity women articulate when they come into theory or materialise ideas in the visual sphere. I would argue that they neither assume a masculine subject-position in some form of myths-identification, nor slip into the passive role of the object; female subjectivity disrupts the opposition between self and other, subject and object which typified the normative ‘I’ of the supposedly universal, gender-neutral individual. However, the fact that female subjectivity cannot be conceived through such normative paradigms does not oblige us to entertain extreme theorist manoeuvres designed to deny subjectivity altogether or to embrace a fragmented, disbursed subject, devoid of agency, responsibility or political potential. Rather, the existence of articulate creative and intellectual women asks us to reconsider the parameters of the subject in new and productive ways such that difference and process might inform more nuanced concepts of subjectivity. Many of the key concepts developed by thinking differently about the interpolation of female subjects have significant implications for arts-practice.

painting

I acknowledge fully the debt owed to the ground prepared by the generations of artists working during the later half of the 20th century. Rosemary Betterton wrote in the forward to *Unframed: Practices & Politics of Women’s Contemporary Painting*:

> Painting, as many commentators and critics have concluded – and bemoaned – over the last few years, has ceased to be central to current critical debates about contemporary art in the western world. Equally, gender issues that had been fore grounded by women’s movements over the previous 30 years are deemed irrevocably passé or, at best, irrelevant to the making of new art. The twin peaks of postmodernism and post-feminism, however ill defined, appear to have overshadowed any serious consideration of the contemporary practices and politics of women who paint.\(^{10}\)

Betterton attempts to redress that balance and to counter two propositions, that painting and feminism are dead, by exploring the current state of making and thinking about painting and women. This is important if we are concerned with the current meaning of both art and gender and in reclaiming a space for different practices for women’s painting.\(^{11}\)

Why painting? Why as a feminist do I have a continuing attachment to painting as a meaningful technique integral to my arts-practice? Why do I invest desires and pleasures in painting? I think the answer lies in questions of the political content or address and in issues of gendered spectatorship and embodiment. By evoking my sense of being a carnal subject, a female subject in a fleshy body, painting can begin to describe a particular set of complex pleasures and displeasures attached to looking as (and being) a woman. It is the material qualities of paint, its sensuousness and colour, its ambiguity and resistance, and the performative act, over and above the signified meaning of any specific painting that engages me. I play in this arena. I am interested in the materiality of paint as a presence while avoiding the pitfalls of certain strands of feminist criticism that asserted in the past that the deconstruction of visual pleasure was, in itself, a feminist act.\(^{12}\)

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11 *ibid*.
12 *ibid*, pp. 4-5.
How is artwork to be read in different contexts including sexual politics? Discursive positioning between the corporeality of the author, the works materiality and its effect in making the bodies of the author and readers, provides a key to examining the practices by which sexual difference might be articulated in and through an individual painted work.

… explore different potentialities for painting outside the modernist paradigm of purity, unity and disembodiment of vision. Instead they propose models of painting practice that offers a means of engaging with and in the world, are performative rather than representational, necessarily gendered and embodied, are capable of transgressing the boundaries between old and new visual technologies, and of rejecting canon formations to engage with different histories and identities. In so doing, they move the debate beyond the sterile set of oppositions between abstraction and realism, feminism or non-feminist genres, traditional or new media, modernist or postmodernist painting.¹³

What Marsha Meskimmon suggests is that the insights developed in re-conceiving female subjectivity are imperative to any undertaking exploring sexual difference and that making, with its decisive links to visuality and materiality has the potential to expand the limits in unique and vital ways.¹⁴

… paintings can be understood, in C.S. Peirce’s term as ‘dynamic objects’; that is, they exceed pure signification and can be understood as bringing something new into being as: ‘a pressure on, or a pulse in, the see-able’. … thus … paintings are not merely images, but materialisations that can have an insistent presence as objects, which is why a slide or a photograph is never enough. … ‘materiality insinuates itself and cuts across the visual language’, in a kind of ‘visual stutter’ that makes a painting more than just a sign. While painting is not unique in this respect – the same claims can be made of the other kinds of art and craft – it is also mimetic. Rosa Lee proposes the concept of mimesis, not as imitation but as the tracing of our bodies in the world.¹⁵

I would like to extend this definition to include the process of tracing our bodies in the world. Why painting? Part of the reason must go back to the sustained critique of painting as a reactionary masculine discourse by feminist artists such as Judy Chicago and critical theorists like Griselda Pollock since the early 1970s. Many women artists at the time consciously rejected painting in favour of less, ‘tainted’ media such as performance, video or installation¹⁶. We are now at a point, however, when new media have themselves become orthodoxy in curatorial pictorial practices and it seems appropriate to begin to consider painting as a practice that is being engendered and embodied by women in new ways.¹⁷

self-portraiture

Whether or not ‘self-representation’ can even be done is the question, and one of the things I am interested in relates to feminist philosophic work, in particular, that which explores beyond mind-body dualism to suggest a logic beyond representation, a logic beyond the mirroring. I want to suggest that there might be strategies which move in that direction and that these strategies would mean that subjects, in their difference, might take place as processes rather than as objects.¹⁸

¹³ ibid, p. 2.
¹⁵ Rosemary Betterton (ed.), op. cit., p. 5.
This is significant in my arts-practice as I constantly question the self/other relationship. Talking about self-representation beyond the mirroring of the self-portrait or the gestural mark that usually indicates the expressive presence of the artist has been an ongoing exploration as I question the debates and theories that circle this field (for example, self portrait: Fiona dolly, Figure 3). These works explore not the picturing of the self but the stereotype and conceptions or preconceptions of the self. These are not literal self-portraits; there is no mirroring or resemblance here. Instead, they question the relationship between self(ves) and other(s), particularly questions of different embodiments, moving beyond dualism and questioning the conventions of self-portraiture premised on exhibiting the self in a very literal sense. These works are printed at a scale that I imagine each doll would be if I were literally that doll. While my sense of humour and imagination are at work here, my intention is always to challenge the viewers’ notion of what a self-portrait might be regarding notions of the decentred self and the polymorphous body. One of the intentions of these works is to satirise certain aspects of the more didactic feminist art through a sense of humour.

A list of artists that have influenced this aspect of my work would be lengthy; however Louise Bourgeois, Barbara Kruger, Tracey Emin, Cindy Sherman and Mary Kelly would appear prominently. These artists have all in some way looked at the problematisation of representation itself and some have taken absolute stances in relation to it, for instance, Mary Kelly’s refuses to depict the female form in her work as being an image which is too ideologically over-determined. While I agree with Kelly’s position and have long looked at her practice with much admiration and empathy, orthodoxy by which women’s art both historical and contemporary was judged (especially figurative painting and an engagement with the nude female body) as anti-feminist and hence excluded, grew out of such singular positioning. I position myself as a multi-faceted subject in control of my own image while taking note of the mistakes of the past.

The works made for the indeterminate precision of narrative explores self-portraiture as a mother of a son aged 11 plus. The representation continues to explore the relationship between self and other while questioning the subject position within that relationship. How do I express this relationship? By bringing woman, artist, narrator and parent into connection I question the relationship between self(ves) and other(s), particularly questions of different embodiments, moving beyond dualism and yet it is an intimate process of imaging, the intimate embodiment of the artist. Once again these works are not literal self-portraits; instead, they question the relationship between bodies.

I began to play with the notion that children (my own) may be looked at as foreign bodies in that they are not self and not other. They are becoming other as they grow. Time for me is measured by their growth (physically, emotionally and academically). Their milestones become my milestones. While I am the author of the works I am also a participant spectator, involved in the process of

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19 ibid.
20 A previous version of Barbie titled self portrait: correction fluid dolly, 2004 was printed at a scale of 400 cm x 88 cm and can be viewed on http://www.lyndalladams.com/2004/html/2004misp-02.html.
22 Specifically Mary Kelly’s Post Partum Document.
making the meaningful, interactive, processes of self articulation. If we think of self-portraiture as inviting interaction, interactivity and intersubjectivity, we are then also questioning ourselves in terms of the critical framework that we actually use to do this. Marsha Meskimmon suggests that contemporary women artists often set up new paradigms when they consider the self as being a problem and question mind-body dualism. They are therefore also questioning the critical exchange. We may not be asking any longer what representation of the self is but what kinds of selves might be materialised in an artwork. What kinds of interactions are possible for artist as agent to materialise selves given subjectivity as an ontology of becoming, an emergent subjectivity which is about agency, nomadism and change, always in the process of becoming?24

living-on

But becoming what? What now? What else? Hal Foster seemed to be asking just such questions in Design and Crime.

Implicit in this account is that postmodernist art was initially “propped” on modernist categories, with all the ambiguity of (in)dependence implied by the word, but that it soon "troped" these categories, in the sense that it treated them as so many completed practices or given terms to be manipulated as such. This map also now registers certain changes since that time: over the last three decades the “expanded field” has slowly imploded, as terms once held in productive contradiction have gradually collapsed into compounds without much tension … This is only one indication of how postmodernist art, which emerged as a troping of modernist categories, is now trumped in turn.25

He goes on to elaborate this position citing critiques as singular as Conceptual, Process, and Body art and asking whether they can be transformed into a tradition or “tradition-substitute”. This has not yet been established and it is certainly not coherent enough to support contemporary arts-practice.26

As a result the recursive strategy of the “neo” appears as attenuated today as the oppositional logic of the “post” is tired: neither suffices as a strong paradigm for artistic or critical practice, and no other ‘model’ stands in their stead. For many this is a good thing: it permits artistic diversity; “weak-theory” is better than strong; and so on. But … our paradigm-of-no-paradigm can also abet a flat indifference, a stagnant incommensurability … and this post historical default of contemporary art is no improvement on the old historicist determinism of modernist art. … All of us (artists, critics, curators, historians, viewers) need some narrative to focus our present practices – situated stories, not grands récits.27

Foster suggests that the term “living-on” may in part resolve this impasse. Without some sort of guide we may remain swamped in the double wake of post/modernism and the neo/avant-garde. Rather than deny this aftermath, then, why not admit it and ask “what now, what else”?28 “Maybe this living-on is not a repeating so much as a making-new or simply a making-do with what-comes-after, a beginning again and/or elsewhere.” Or possibly a taking up of theses not fully resolved in order to resolve them further.29 When considered in relation to the unsophisticated use of deconstructive critique in visual representation, this offers an interesting move away from an impasse, which has resulted in disengagement with social representation, whilst avoiding some of its pitfalls.

24 Marsha Meskimmon, Mirror Mirror: Conference papers, Selves Beyond Representation: Contemporary art and female subjects, op. cit.
26 Ibid. p. 128.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid. p. 129.
29 Ibid.
Figure 1: Installation view, *the indeterminate precision of narrative*, Grafton Regional Gallery, 7 March - 15 April, 2007.
He outlines a few categories of this living-on, as “nonsynchronous”, “traumatic”, “spectral” and “incongruent”. Foster admits that his examples are disparate and his categories artificial as they tend to cross. They may however begin to evoke a condition of coming-after as the practices Foster has in mind often treats given genres or mediums as somehow completed, they do not pastiche them in a post historical manner. The criterions suggested by Foster are useful in identifying and critically evaluating a range of conceptual and theoretical positions.

The potential of the “nonsynchronous” is explored in the installation view of, the indeterminate precision of narrative (Figure 1), by combining different elements and image styles together. The strategy here is to make a new medium out of remnants old forms (combining oil paint and acrylic digital prints), while holding together the different temporal markers in a single visual structure. The link to the mnemonic is crucial at this point; in order to engage with the work the aids to memory need to be stimulated as an index to a world lost to us. Foster talks about a past lost to us and as a result the potential of that history is not yet spent. I construct a more personal schism – moments where trauma and joy collide. It is at that moment when memory is triggered and the loss of ones parent (and hence past) is felt keenly while simultaneously the joy of watching a loved child becoming self - crash into each other.

The “traumatic” speaks to aspects of experience in a failure to mourn lost relationships in Head Fall and me (Figure ). This grotesque self-portrait comes from a collaborative exhibition, titled Pause Play with collaborating artist Fiona Fell. The focus of this exhibition explicitly played with the notions of foreign bodies and of the stranger and estrangement. These works are neither a representation of the outsider, the stranger, nor a representation of the self, while being all simultaneously, allowing debates surrounding self-portraiture, resemblance and representation to be unwrapped. This exhibition introduces the idea of collaboration between artists being an issue of interactions between bodies, performativity, emergence and becoming.

The “spectral” is examined in Self portrait: Fiona dolly (Figure ). This ghostly figure floats across the installation space in human dimensions like some apparition from the past evoking fragmented memories while generating the potential for a multiplicity of dialogues on body imaging which interface feminist discourse. This work also comes from the Pause Play exhibition and explores shadows in the work and the traces of making as well as the history of art in that “living-on”.

By researching aspects of the “incongruent” (Figures 4 and 5) I have juxtaposed traces from different spaces using different materials. This work projects a lyrical kind of criticality reframing given spaces as hybrid objects that extends meaning beyond the limits of the frame or indeed the gallery walls.

The terms of reference I have fleshed out in this chapter were intended to clarify the contemporary theoretical debates that scaffold the conceptual boundaries for my art-practice. It is for convenience sake and clarity only that I have written them under distinct subheadings. Each is as important in the scheme of things as each other. Each blends, merges, informs and interrupts each other subheading in-practice.

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30 ibid, p. 130.
31 Installation images from the Pause Play exhibition can be viewed on http://www.lyndalladams.com/2006/html/2006-PausePlay.html
Figure 2: *Head Fall and me*, 10 mm Acrylic Print - double pass, 68 x 100 cm, 2006.
Figure 3: *self portrait: Fiona dolly*, 10 mm Acrylic Print - double pass, 110 x 90 cm, 2006.
Figure 4: (this page), Installation view, *the indeterminate precision of narrative*, Grafton Regional Gallery, 7 March - 15 April, 2007.

Figure 5: (next page), *camouflage sequence ix*, 10 mm Acrylic Print - double pass, 107 x 90 cm, 2007.
2

the impact of serendipity

methodology

This chapter explores methodologies applied by arts-practice-led research in some detail. A vocabulary of arts-practice-led-research would include non-linear systems that are inclusive, chaotic, and holistic. These systems explore how my ontological position and the methodologies outlined are catalysts for studio production. Practice-led research is pluralistic in approach; uses multi-method techniques tailored to the individual project; reflexivity is acknowledged and interaction of the researcher with research material is recognised. Within this field the researcher reflects-in-action and reflects-on-action and is adaptive. Active documentation is essential for transparency and explicitness. The writings of Paul Carter on material thinking have also influenced the methodology.

arts-practice-led research

Methodologies engaged by arts-practice-led research involve a process of information gathering; including various visual and multi-media methods of selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication including: journals, digital photographs, proofs and drafts. These methodologies are vehicles for studio production. The methodology used is described by what Gray and Pirie observed as:

... the artist-practitioner/researcher is embedded within the procedures and responds to the reciprocating relationship between responsive research strategies and associative creative artistic practices, reflecting both in and on action. The practice as research is identified as a ‘generating’ instrument. Research processes are tailored to respond to practice and practice to research, continually re-orientating itself to refine the research question through reflexive processes. The ‘interdisciplinary’ nature of the research supports a range of research strategies which are multi-method in approach, rigorous, open, transparent and accessible. This indicates a move from scientific positivistic models of research towards humanistic models, based upon new intellectual paradigms (i.e. the complexity and randomness of chaos theory) and must consider the ontological (knowable in art) and epistemological (relationships of enquirer to knowledge) issues, which are ‘adaptive’ and ‘reflective’ acknowledging the ‘impact of serendipity’.

My understanding in the proposal phase was that research material might not necessarily be replicable, but could be made accessible, communicable and understood. Unlike other research models, arts-practice-led research is satisfied to validate an answer with a question. A suitable outcome of this phase included extended research, shaping the development of a body of work and its discourse, using the product of the initial documentation and collaboration with industry (see Chapter 5 packaging technologies and potentials) to refine each idea through a method of immersion. I planned a process of systematic editing, generating work through elimination.

While the process of editing was systematic, it was also subjective and to some extent reliant on the impact of serendipity. Finding something unexpected and useful while searching for something else entirely provided movement from divergent, non-sequential parts into a readable order. This generated the process of materialisation: taking the edited and refined ideas to a point of resolution. Within this phase, the works took on a unified form even though within an arts-practice-led research paradigm a given work is never static, even beyond the point of apparent realisation. At the point of resolution a process of critical engagement with the edited work was entered – a reflective study that marked a point of conclusion within the work. For example: the shadows formed by clear ink printed onto acrylic in pause play (Figure 6) was unexpected as was the dropping out of colour due to the use of transparent inks. This serendipitous result was adapted and emphasised for the printing technique in The O’Grady sisters redrawn: a contemporary view of five women artists from the collection (Figure 7) and extensively used in the indeterminate precision of narrative exhibition (Figure 4 and 5).

Gray and Pirie identify arts based methodologies as pluralistic, holistic, hybrid, anarchical and that creative processes are governed by inclusive, non-linear complex
Arts-practice-led methodological approaches to research are fluid, eclectic mechanisms driven by the critical and contextual demands of the research inquiry seated within reflexive, revisionist, subjectivist, individualistic and responsive processes of scholarly practice. Russell in Gray and Malins confirmed that there is no one universally accepted methodological approach to research within art and although there are some similarities between social science, art and design processes contexts can be radically different.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Installation view, The O’Grady sisters redrawn: a contemporary view of five woman artists from the collection, Grafton Regional Gallery, double skin, 10 mm Acrylic Print - double pass, dimension variable, 2006.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{33} ibid.
Figure 8: Studio process (photographed daily)
Schon identified the importance of tacit knowledge in arts-practice-led research. Tacit knowledge relates to human activity and learning and refers to embodied knowledge. It has been argued that the operation of embodied knowledge has often been overlooked because it is subsumed into the rational logic of discursive accounts of artistic production.

Methodologies associated with creative practice as research may move beyond traditional approaches to research, inclusive of the ongoing reflexive nature associated with this area. Through the methodologies and because of the multiple shifts of interpretive paradigms in the creative arts, there could be a difference, creating tensionings, between the creative and reflective outcomes within the practice. This is evidenced by the publication sequences of the research documented on www.lyndalladams.com. After each publication/exhibition, a period of reflection was entered into prior to immersion in the studio.

The methodology used as in other research paradigms is based on the evaluation and validation of the work according to some criteria. However, in arts-practice-led research an important aspect is the relationship between the experience of the work and its explanation. This is because knowledge is experienced through the work, it is the various relationships between the explanation of the work, and the work itself via some type of methodology that makes it research. An important associated issue is the representation of the creative work as a research finding. The experience of the work as a site of knowledge means that the works’ presentation is its publication. This refers to exhibitions, performances, recordings, etc.

Material Thinking

The discipline of making works of art is a peculiar one. As Paul Carter states:

It happens when the artist dares to ask the simple far-reaching questions. What matters? What is the material of thought? To ask these questions is to embark on an intellectual adventure peculiar to the making process. Critics and theorists interested in communicating ideas about things cannot emulate it. They remain outsiders, interpreters on the sidelines, usually trying to make sense of a creative process afterwards, purely on the basis of its outcome. They lack access to the process and, more fundamentally, they lack the vocabulary to explicate its intellectual character.

While locating myself as an insider with access to the making process, a vocabulary capable of explaining the elusive temperament of arts-practice is a complex task because of the indeterminacy involved. In Carter’s view: “the discipline of writing about making works of art is not only peculiar but additionally loaded when language seems so inadequate to the task.” My frustration with this process is simply put by Carter as tongue-tied. What is made (materially) and how it is made cannot be easily put into words. This is not because the creative process cannot stand up to rational enquiry. It is the intricacy of creative research that makes writing in a plain but non-reductive form complicated.

35 Carole Gray and Ian Pirie, op. cit.
37 See Appendix 1: List of research publications and www.lyndalladams.com.
40 Ibid.
The ‘creative process’ is not in the least mystical. The decisions that characterise it are material ones, and a good techne, or craft of shaping or combination, has to be open to criticism and correction. As for the eloquence of the works, the problem is, if anything an excess of articulateness. Their way of communicating (strictly, their discourse) is four dimensional. They are ‘articulate’ precisely because they are articulated – jointed or joined together – in a variety of way and dimensions. Theirs is a symbolic representation of the phenomenal, a picture of the way the world is constructed that participates in its complexity rather than eliminates it.  

The excess of articulateness that Carter refers to regarding the works discourse does not make for clarity in writing. Clarity is in many ways impossible in any case primarily because the variety of ways and dimensions that any discourse takes are complex. This is inclusive of what happens in the translation between the performative act of painting (and the material thinking) and the trace or object that is the artefact of that performativity.

This then shifts the critical focus away from the evaluation of the artwork as a product or object, to an understanding of both studio enquiry and its outcomes as process. Any exploration of this type is a move away from art criticism to the notion of a critical discourse of arts-practice-led enquiry that involves viewing the artist as a researcher and the artist/critic as a scholar who comments on the value of the artistic process as the production of knowledge. Taking seriously this move from matter/object/artefact to material thinking obliges us to step away from abstract, universal modes of thinking subjectivity, towards studio practices, which speak to the subject in the richness of its desiring, embodied and living agency.

documentation

The process of making is not clear. It is murky. Active documentation of the research is essential for transparency and explicitness. Documentation of studio process requires a particular attention to detail in as much as a systematic approach is necessary for the sake of clarity. Various visual and multi-media methods of information gathering are utilized in the form of journals, photographs, sketches and schematic plans. While research material may not necessarily be replicated, it can be made accessible, communicable and understood.

My approach to studio practice is methodical. Advanced planning is essential regarding size, scale and materials required. This begins for me with drawings, journal entries and preparing the grounds for the smaller preparatory studies (Figure 8). The selection of materials uses in the studio has relevance at this point. The stories I tell guide these decisions. How I make decisions regarding which story and how they are told dictate my selection. Choices made in the studio imbed meaning into layers of the work. The size, shape, colour, surface, depth and construction of the picture plain are the base for meaning (or story telling) when I design the work. The theoretical meaning is built on this foundation (Figures 9 to 26).

Selection of materials is dependant on the ideas with which I am working. I try to keep the ideas simple. Complexity builds itself into the research as the process of making advances. The research for ellipsis was surrounded by theories I had been considering in

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41 ibid, pp. xi - xii.
43 Marsha Meskimmon, Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics, op. cit., p. 94.
Figures 9 to 14: Studio process, *Ellipsis* series (left to right): preparatory collage (family document circa 1912, high school text book page (1960's circa), childrens' story book circa 1930s); journal sketch; studio process; preparatory study (acrylic on paper); work in progress; *Fall ...,* oil on canvas, 80 cm x 80 cm, 2006.
the impact of serendipity
Figures 15 to 20: Studio process, *Ellipsis* series (right to left): preparatory collage (*Reader Digest* page circ 1950s, addresses envelope 1912); journal sketch; preparatory study (acrylic on paper); work in progress; *... if you can draw*, oil on canvas, 100 cm x 100 cm, 2006; *you are in demand* ..., oil on canvas, 80 cm x 80 cm, 2006.
Figures 21 to 26: Studio process, *Ellipsis* series (left to right): preparatory collage (*Post* page 1958, book spin circa 1910s, childrens’ story book circa 1930s); journal sketch; preparatory study (acrylic on paper); work in progress; *school girls bumper book* ..., oil on canvas, 100 cm x 100 cm, 2006; *Dear Will* ..., oil on canvas, 80 cm x 80 cm, 2006.
regards to memory, history and archive. I sorted through my collections looking for material that fitted into all three categories. When one begins to tell a story of a life, your-own or someone else’s, subjectivity plays a major role in the outcome. The resultant narrative is an edited version. Imperfect, fuzzy, out of focus and imprecise as that edited version might be, it begins to approach something of a story. Not everything about your subject can be told in one image. I choose which pieces are left in and which pieces are left out. At some point in this selection process installation, the museum space and lighting are considered and envisaged as they also play a dynamic role in the narration. There is logic to this making of stories. The logic of becoming – stories constantly moving between multiple images and hence meanings. The story telling begins in the studio. The stories I tell are about the way in which I walk around in the world, everyday stories about the world around me: the activity, the people, the colours, the light, and the connection I make.

The impact of serendipity cannot be overlooked in this telling of stories. Useful discoveries that are made quite by accident occur at regular intervals in the studio environment. For example: (Figures 27 to 32) this sequence demonstrates the process of image generation that has developed over the research period. This method grew out of a series of fortuitous accidents in the studio. The sequence chronicles the process of making from the initial photograph taken as a “family snapshot” to the installation of the work in the gallery. The studio environment is not a pristine one. Things have a way of stacking up: an accumulation of the paraphernalia of making results from the collection of various tools and interesting objects that may come in handy, along with drying paintings, proofs for printed works and working drawings. The space of making begins to tell its own story, one that is more chaotic and less willing to be controlled. This environment has an impact on the work.

Within the loop of making, it is only publication deadlines that insist on resolution. I understand the loop of making as a description of embodied subjectivity, the physical act of working as existential phenomenology (see chapter 3 the lived body) in direct relation to the process of material thinking in the studio. We can see how experience as it is given to us is always a subject-object dialogue. Just when I am aware of things as determinate and thematic, new possibilities emerge on the horizon and the past fades away as more ambiguous. As a result, when I experience a thing within a context, this spatial-temporal context is temporary and unfolding over time, and subject to change within limits as such becoming has a direction. While the resultant works, are autonomous forms they are also a part of social histories. How can they not be? I cannot step outside the concerns of my time. All research is essentially creative in its endeavour to model and evaluate some situation, concept or phenomenon. I consider that arts-practice-led-research is no different. Outcomes of the research are reliant on selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication. This is communicated through the publication of the research (see appendices 1 and 2, and www.lyndalladams.com).

Figure 27: page 31, family snap shot; Figure 28: page 32, digital manipulation of a family snap shot; Figure 29: page 33, swinging 4, oil paint on linen, 112 x 112 cm, 2007; Figure 30: page 34, swinging 4 (detail), oil paint on linen, 112 x 112 cm, 2007; Figure 31: page 35, computer file image of camouflage sequence ix, (digital manipulation of swinging 4 - detail); Figure 32: page 36, Installation view, swinging 4 and camouflage sequence ix, Grafton Regional Gallery, oil paint on linen and 10 mm Acrylic Print - double pass, overall dimensions 150 x 200 cm, 2007.
This chapter explores the impact of the lived body on arts-practice-led research. My arts-practice attempts to articulate the female body, the lived body that is neither a-cultural nor a-historical, but rather determined and specific and reliant on the intervention of serendipity. It speaks of tension between the sublime and the corporeal, between the available tools of artistic practice and the desire to (re)present women's specificity.\(^{44}\) I locate that specificity in the performative aspects of painting as tracing our bodies in the world; the performance of making; my emersion in the process of making and the integration of issues surrounding embodiment. The research responds to the role of complex narrative structures in positioning visual images of the body and engages with contemporary theoretical considerations that currently address the body.

The creative process … realises (it releases) the inventiveness of matter in a way that eludes descriptions of reality couched in terms of simple concepts, one-to-one equivalences or (no less self-indulgent) free-associative poetic reveries. Finally, as posed, timed or emergent works, they give back to time its materiality, the sense of temporal process.\(^{45}\)

This sense of the temporal process of making is the purpose of this writing: writing ‘of’ rather than ‘about’ creative research. Clearly I am making a distinction here between the process of making and the resultant art object. This in no way means to trivialise the resultant works of art as objects. The artwork does however become an artefact or trace of the performative aspects of making. As Barbara Bolt states, “… through creative practice, a dynamic material exchange can occur between objects, bodies and images. Imaging in turn, can produce real material effects in the world.”\(^{46}\) It has been suggested that working in the studio acts as a rehearsal for how we come into ‘an experience of the world’. The studio can be understood as an instrument of phenomenological subjectivity in the world. This is because our embodiment is premised on the mutually constituted agency of the self/other, or self in/of the world. In the studio, we rehearse the world through the body\(^ {47}\) performing the senses (site, touch and memory) and making them visible and tangible.

**phenomenology**

Recently feminist cultural critics and artists have turned to phenomenology, particularly the writings of Merleau-Ponty, in order to explore issues of embodiment, tactility and the relations of being in the world.\(^ {48}\) For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not just

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\(^{44}\) Sarah Tutton, *op. cit.*

\(^{45}\) Paul Carter, *op. cit.*


\(^{48}\) Rosemary Betterton (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 9.
something that goes on in our heads. Rather, our intentional consciousness is experienced in and through our bodies. With his concept of the lived body, Merleau-Ponty overcomes Descartes’ mind-body dualism without resorting to physiological reductionism. For Merleau-Ponty the body is not a machine, but a living organism by which we go out into the world with all of our possibilities. The course of a person’s life is lived through the body. We are our bodies, and consciousness is not just locked up inside the head. In his later thought, Merleau-Ponty talked of the body as “flesh,” made of the same flesh of the world, and it is because the flesh of the body is of the flesh of the world that we can know and understand the world.\textsuperscript{49}

In the view of Elizabeth Grosz we have forgotten not just the body but all that makes it possible and limits its actions.

... the precarious, accidental, contingent, expedient, striving, dynamic status of life in a messy, complicated, resistant, brute world of materiality, a world regulated by exigencies, the forces, of space and time. We have forgotten the nature, the ontology, of the body, the conditions under which bodies are enculturated, psychologised, given identity, historical location, and agency.\textsuperscript{50}

The body is both transcendent and immanent. It is the “third term” between subject and object. This is not to say it is a gap or an interstice. It is an ontology of becoming which is active and hence emergent.\textsuperscript{51} It is something that is not the subject and is not the object; it is a third thing coming between them that connects them.\textsuperscript{52} I know that transcendent things exist because I can touch them, see them and hear them. Most importantly, I never know things in their totality, but always from an embodied perspective. I can only see things from a certain perspective because I am a body and yet, because I am a body, I can also experience the thing as being more than that partial perspective. The thing exists “in itself” because it resists my knowing it with total certainty. However, the thing exists “for me” because I always experience it in relation to my own body. My studio easels, for example, are something to stand or sit at and draw or paint on; they have been set for my height. Things allow for certain bodily engagements while closing off others inclusive of sedimented bodily gestures that are taught. In this sense, things are both transcendent and immanent; things as given to experience are each an “in-itself-for-me” always in a state of becoming. If we can understand this idea of the “in-itself-for-me,” we can see how experience as it is given to us is always a subject-object dialogue.

Experiencing something as something is inescapably dependant on an interpretative paradigm of that experience that makes it available as experience. That paradigm is not however, simply a closed world-view in itself within which an individual is immersed and inescapably confined. Rather the individual always already experiences the limits and breakage points of that interpretive framework and while the limits and breakage points are experienced, they resist total sublation into reflective knowledge. This is not to call into question this limitation, but rather to emphasize it with the support of the point that institutes reflexivity and as a result retroactively also installs a moment of the pre-reflexive.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Elizabeth Grosz, op. cit., p. 2.
\textsuperscript{51} Elizabeth Grosz, op. cit., p. 280, n 13.
\textsuperscript{52} Elizabeth Grosz, Helen McDonald, Philip Rothfield and Sue Best, “Art and Deleuze: A roundtable interview with Elizabeth Grosz”, Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art, Vol. 7, Number 2, 2006, pp. 4 - 22.
Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between the pre-reflective and the reflective. When we reflect on experience, what we reflect on is viewed as hard-edged and defined; as having specific dimensions and clear meanings. This reflected experience can be determinate and hard-edged only against an indeterminate, ambiguous background. Experience begins in the pre-reflective, and reflection is always an abstract derivative of this elemental, pre-reflective, lived experience (the ready-to-hand). For Merleau-Ponty, lived experience is prior to abstract reflection; it is pre-thematic. We live it, but don’t explicitly think about and calculate what we are doing. When I am most typically engaged in a task, I do not reflect on the task, and this mode of ready-to-hand engagement is the basic, experiential ground which makes reflection possible. Whenever we reflect intellectually on experience, we have to go back to the lived world of our experience prior to that reflection. The lived world of my experience is one that engages in arts-practice-led research. I take notes and photograph sequences in the studio but when I am immersed in the process I am fully engaged. Pre-reflective experience of the studio and in the studio is an embodied occurrence.

Meno’s paradox

When I begin to make a series of work, I begin by utilizing various multimedia information gathering techniques such as sketches, drawings, collages, photographs and preparatory studies (see chapter 2, the impact of serendipity). My research is usually directed by previous studio research. I do not know exactly what it is that I am looking for. I do not know exactly what it is that I am looking to describe. I wonder if I would recognise the thing even if I found it. How would it be possible to describe a process in enough detail when the process being described is indeterminate? Apparently this conundrum has a long history and has been written about extensively. It is known as Meno’s paradox. Meno’s paradox comes from the dialogue between Meno and Plato in Plato’s Meno. Meno poses a dilemma to Plato: “But how will you look for something when you don’t in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don’t know as the object of your search? To put it another way, even if you come right up against it, how will you know that what you found is the thing you didn’t know?” Meno’s Paradox raises the frightening prospect that we could be immersed in an ocean of evidence and would not recognize it for what it is.

Merleau-Ponty’s existential-phenomenological epistemology and ontology can be seen as settling the dilemma of Meno’s paradox. It does so by showing clearly how both empiricism and rationalism fail to do so. Merleau-Ponty writes: “Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism (rationalism) fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching.” Instead, Merleau-Ponty begins with the everyday, lived engagement with the world (the ready-to-hand) and what he finds is that we originally experience things as rich and multi-determinate, always within a context. Things as we experience them are discovered through a subject-object dialogue. In order to understand how Merleau-Ponty understands this subject-object dialogue, we first need to understand, something which Merleau-

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54 Brent Dean Robbins, op cit.
55 This is not to say that I cannot envisage many of the defining characteristics of the research parameters, i.e. size, shape, scale, media, theoretical and conceptual underpinnings etc.
57 ibid.
Ponty brought to phenomenology: the idea of the lived body. As Grosz states:

My body occupies a privileged position insofar as it is a moving center through which I gain access to and perception of all the other objects and is thus a continually reorienting framework through which objects are contained or represented in a field surrounding it, a context.58

I know when I have found what I am looking for because the world is already charged with meaning in relation to my body. Things begin as ambiguous but become more determinate as I become bodily engaged with them. Then again, I do not already know what I am looking for, because the world transcends my total grasp. At any given time, the world as it is accepted includes not only what is revealed to me, but also what is concealed59. Documenting and describing the arts-practice-led research in which I have been engaged, relies on my writing about what was and is revealed and concealed simultaneously. That is, the writing requires me to write about my emersion in the process of making as an essential element of the methodology alongside documenting the processes engaged-in by that emersion.

painting is performative

Performative research is described by Brad Haseman as "expressed in non-numeric data, but in forms of symbolic data other than words in discursive text". Included in this definition are material forms of practice.60 Barbara Bolt uses the writings of Deleuze on 'linguistic performativity of the artist' to disrupt visual language and visual narrative. She argues the case that matter disrupts visual language. It is this disruption she suggests that sets the visual language stuttering and vibrating. The distinction between paint's presence and the materiality of paint provides us with the vocabulary to begin to elaborate such a proposition. Paint's presence constitutes the way the content is ordered and presented, as such; it is inextricably linked to the meanings we derive from the work.

Gilles Deleuze stated:

If language imitates bodies, it is not through onomatopoeia, but true reflection. And if bodies imitate language, it is not through organs, but true reflection...

In collection... there is a double transgression space -- space of language by the flesh and of flesh by language.61

This refers not to the limits of language but to an outside of language. A space where the body interacts with the language system which shifts the notion of performativity from one in which the body is inscribed by language to one where the body becomes language. In this reconceptualization, the sign is reconfigured by the tempo and throb of the body.62 Painting is one such performative act.

Characteristics of painting exceed the purely visual and relate to bodily senses of touch, rhythm and gesture, as well as various modes of vision. These modes of vision are not meant to imitate life but to find an equivalent for life, aiming not at an illusion nor at reality/realism or mimesis but at a corresponding visual narrative. A painted piece of work emerges as a response to a story not previously

58 Elizabeth Grosz, op. cit., pp. 164-165.
59 Brent Dean Robbins, op. cit.
60 Brad Haseman, "Rupture and Recognition: Identifying the Performative Research Paradigm", in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (eds.), op. cit. pp. 150 - 151.
61 Barbara Bolt, "Painting is not a Representational Practice", in Rosemary Betterton (ed.), op. cit, p. 45.
62 ibid.
told. A retrieval that speaks to the way I walk around in the world, a retrieval of the self and a movement towards others.

Painting is a complex practice that engages with the psychic and the somatic; it is ongoing and relational and, at the same time, located in specific times and places. This implies a shift away from our former understanding firstly, on a focus on painting primarily as a system in semiotics analysis, to a concept of painting as having an indexically fickle relation to the world: it is simultaneously both a trace/artefact of making and a material presence. A second shift is from thinking about paintings solely as an ‘object’, towards an understanding of painting as an intersubjective process: a practice of materialization involving the play of objects, bodies, materials, technologies and discourses. And within Western culture, this practice is always gendered.

I use painting as a way of reflecting on and understanding my place in the world. This involves engagement with perceptive and bodily memories encompassing the production of works that are embodied, sexed, gendered, has a race, class and historically situated subject. Situatedness of knowledge has been a crucial concept in recent feminist theory. While these ideas are not new, in the context of painting, they offer a powerful means of disrupting existing aesthetic and political categories.  

Barbara Bolt writes of her experience of painting (and I agree) as: the painting taking on a life of its own, a life that seems to have almost nothing to do with her conscious attempt to control it. The work takes on its own momentum, its own rhythm and intensity. Within this intense and curious state, in the fury of painting, rules give way to the pragmatics of action. The painting transcends itself and becomes a dissembling present. In an act of concurrent actual production, it exceeds the sign and becomes simultaneously sign and not sign.

It breathes, vibrates, pulsates, shimmers and generally runs away from me. The painting no longer merely represents or illustrates reading. Instead, it performs. In the performing of imaging, life gets into the image.

**Materiality**

Materiality, on the other hand, is the insistence of the medium within the operation of the work’s meaning. It is the operation of matter that causes the disruption of the traditional categories of interpretation. Materiality produces the means by which the visual language and visual narrative are disrupted. Paint works by staging an appearance and becoming present. In staging an appearance a material transfiguration is involved. In arguing for a productive materiality in painting, I suggest that in the interaction between matter of bodies and the materiality of paint that a visual stutter is enabled (see chapter 1, *terms of reference*). Accordingly, matter’s insistence does not only include the materiality of the media, but also includes the matter of the artist’s graphic performativity and the matter of the thing itself.

*How energetic can matter be? How is it possible to suggest that matter’s insistence includes the matter of the thing in itself? Here we can draw attention to the relation between the sign and the reference. How can an image exceed its structure as representation in a*

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64 Barbara Bolt, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 - 3.
65 *ibid*, p. 1.
radical material performativity and perform rather than stand for or signify its reference? Is it possible to configure a matrix in which a painting is both a sign and an act of simultaneous tangible production?  

According to Barbara Bolt in visual and semiotic terms, this would mean the unpresentable, the unpicturable, the inconceivable and the unseeable, impinging on the seen and represented. It operates as a pressure on, or pulse in, the seeable. The insistence of the dynamic object constitutes a key energy of the painting and so painting is not just the coded immediate object, there is also the pressure of the dynamic object. In this way the dynamic object prevents the painting from being reduced to; just a sign. Pierce’s theory of semiosis and transformation relies on this pressure from outside the immediate object. In imaging, the dynamic object insists that its presence is felt. Its pressure and vibrations erupt as the work of painting. Conversely, such specificity is in danger of remaking works of art in anthropomorphic form and ignores precisely how, as material objects, they interact with the viewer. This kind of viewing is neither disinterested nor instantaneous, but directly dependent upon the embodiment of the viewer.

*embodied viewing*

In order to see the artwork not only as an object, but also as a part of an intersubjective event, viewers who can move in space are needed rather than a disembodied line to complete it. This signifies a more complex relationship involving viewing. Relationships between the visual and tactile in which ideas of duration and ‘touching with the eyes’ are made explicit in the reciprocal relationship between vision and touch are offered to the viewer as an event. In other words, the codification on which the artworld insists when viewing work impacts on the works on the wall or in space. They “mean” in a different way. This is not to lessen the experience of that object or to de/object the artwork or to trivialise the exhibition or the exhibition power of that artwork. It is another phase of the process, a phase in which the viewer moves around the object/artefact. Of course; this is also a performative act.

… to shift the viewing relationship from instrumental to embodied, thereby reinstating the significance of corporeality to knowledge. Corporeal theory, bearing the material traces from place to place, does not resolve as a unity. The specificity of sexual difference, as the trace of particular bodies and embodiment (not ‘the body’), leaves its mark on aesthetic practices giving them potential to recover sensory hierarchies and materialise the ‘inter’ or in-between. Materialising this ‘inter’ space has radical ramifications for both the articulation of female subjectivity and for the interpellation of subjects-in process.

Concepts of materiality do not simply act as frameworks by which art is explained more proficiently, nor do artworks simply supply helpful illustrations that make complex theories more accessible. It is the interface of the body and discourse, the correlation between the senses, the physical and the conscious, the reconfiguration of corporeality beyond the logic of the subject-object partition and the critical realigning of representation that find their most keen and amplified form.

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66 ibid., pp. 46-7.
67 ibid., p. 49.
71 ibid., p. 94.
4
the indeterminate precision of narrative

telling stories …

The indeterminate precision of narrative is the culmination of multiple exhibitions that engage with the uncertain, unfixed and yet simultaneously accurate and truthful nature of story telling. There is no single narrative that can explain our historic present. To tell a story is to retell stories from the past in order to create coherent narratives in the present. The narrative structures the exhibitions enquire into focus on images and objects that speak to the body in hybrid forms.

The stories I was told as a child were visual and verbal. My father would tell of his adventures with Robin Hood in the Galapagos Islands while he would draw scenes from those adventures. One of the animal characters from this story telling was a boac; a crocodile with wings like an aeroplane. He would write in block letters across the animal's body, BOAC. It was not until my older sister could read that we had an inkling that all he said may not be true. Another clue came when the afternoon serial of Robin Hood began on television. When asked where Maid Marion was while he and Robin were off on their adventures, he would reply, “It was long before he went to Sherwood Forest”. I explained this to all of my friends but wondered why Robin and Marion never came to stay. I also wondered just how old my father was and whether it was dad who changed the way he dressed or Robin. Regardless, I regarded these stories as the truth.

My mother’s prize possession was a 1946 copy of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. Her father had given it to her on his return from a trip to America. I loved this book and faithfully copied John Tenniel’s illustrations from my earliest memories and right through to my late teens, although I may have been a little confused regarding the characters to begin with (Figure 33). This book tied in very well with my father’s story telling although the types of
illustrations were quite different. Each time a story is told, it is told differently. Sometimes the voice of the teller is different, sometimes the details change. It is the accumulation of these stories that make us who we are and how we walk around in the world. It is our introduction to language and our way of interpreting that language. The stories I tell continue in that tradition.

The process of being formed as and forming a reflective relation with myself through emplotment is governed by the intrasubjective and intersubjective, the diachronic and synchronic as well as of the unconscious and conscious. Imaginative remembering then is captured as a discrepancy that makes up human potential, rather than as a property inherent to a subject. The form of this human potential is that of always already being entangled in stories, but these stories are permanently only partially unfolded, and how they unfold in a given situation is never predeterminable. I am constantly entangled inevitably in a plurality of stories in both directions of past and future, and neither past nor future is ever brought to the point of full closure.

The popular texts of everyday life, as well as the theorists who critique both everyday life and its texts, work to detect and to define those potentialities and possibilities made available by changing social and technological conditions. The body is inscribed by the positionings it is assigned and enacts; it is assigned to positionings by the inscriptions it exhibits; it is positioned technologically in a community for whom these inscriptions may or may not have meanings. The meanings my research responds to are formed by the cultural context of pre-existing social and cultural material inherited by me (the narrator) as a performative presence able to describe social and historical surfaces which constitute my sense of subjectivity.72 Because of the fluid nature of the social reality in which it exists and functions, the polymorphous body is obliged to engage in this exploration.

… the narrator

The narrator of the stories I tell can be conceived of, not just as a personal presence but also as a form of action that operates at a level fundamentally contradictory to the action of the story. This action is performative. The narrative act has a status independent not just of the content of the telling (story and characters), but of any final meaning of the story. The association of the latter with “the author” may nowadays be considered naive; but it is in fact no less naive to associate such meaning with “the narrator.” What we have traditionally called the narrator is not a fixed entity capable of dictating a determinant meaning but is the discourse produced by the act of narrating, a discourse which makes meaning and cannot specify it. Rather than an author with an “author function” that separates itself from the text in order to force conformity on it and bring to a stop the progress of the multiplicity (rhizomic in structure) of discourse and in so doing assigning to the story a non-performative status, the narrator is that multiplicity or act performed. This refers to both studio process and installation space.73

The types of stories I tell are performatively produced by the narrative act and therefore the product of the narrator’s rearrangement of the elements of the plot. The meaning or plot is not pre-determined or “caused” by the act of narrating but may be given meaning by the cultural context in which it is received and understood. What we call cultural context does not explain the narrative act but rather

73 ibid.
enables us to describe it. The narrator as such is not a private, internal subject distinct from the more external forces of culture but can be understood as the workings of the discourses of culture.\textsuperscript{74}

As a performative presence, the narrator is dispersed along the sequential alignment of the text and may be conceived of as a fold in the social and historical surfaces, which constitute our sense of subjectivity. In narrative discourse, social and cultural forces define or constitute the narrative presence. That presence presupposes and is not produced by, a social and cultural context, a network of both narrative and non-narrative actions, in which it is embedded and to which it has relation. This is because all tellings are retellings and all narrators are first readers of the tales they retell.\textsuperscript{75} The material thinking of the studio is itself a narrative act. The narration is handed over to the viewer as they walk through the installation space.\textsuperscript{76}

… the mother narrator

While I am telling the stories of my life, they are stories that find a cultural space and identification for myself (beyond mirroring) and articulate the situated narratives that structure my subjectivity as gendered. Griselda Pollack suggests and I concur that while women read autobiographically none have as yet their own autobiography. We are owned by the culture in which we live and have been educated. We are “trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as Other, estranged to ourselves” and to speak “with a borrowed voice”. While I resist this training it is only from within ideologies that already frame that resistance.\textsuperscript{77}

According to Pollack; “the sign of an always sexually differentiated and differentiating convergence of masculine and feminine interest is the ‘mother’.\textsuperscript{78} One of the narrative strands of the story I am telling in the indeterminate precision of narrative speaks to the maternal body. While I am not attempting to privilege motherhood I am speaking to the maternal body in all its ambivalence and structural centrality to the drama of the subject. The narratives of culture and the possibilities of reading within ‘inscription of/in/from the feminine’ disrupt stereotypical images or absence of the mother within Western modernist culture.\textsuperscript{79}

… the phallocentric regime of the subject is based on the repression of the mother, and with her, the repression of the possibilities of different differences that the maternal body, voice and space come to represent in a phallocentric system. Such a mother-repressing system is organised around the authority of the Father, representing the Law that makes separation from the Mother the price of acquiring language, sexuality and thus subjectivity. … femininity as something which already negatively exists as a figure in contemporary cultural representation.\textsuperscript{80}

Indeed throughout this document I have used the terms parent or nurturer when describing “mother” in relations to myself. My avoidance of gender specific language comes from my hesitation to be labelled in negative terms. So much so that I insisted on my

\textsuperscript{74} ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} A good example of this aspect of the narrator in regards to my arts-practice can be seen on www.lyndalladams.com in the film section of 2007 (either of the installation films would be suitable). The narrator here is Taw Adams-Flynn, a 13-year-old boy.
\textsuperscript{77} Griselda Pollock, op. cit., pp. 156 - 7.
\textsuperscript{78} ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., pp. 34 - 5.
\textsuperscript{80} ibid., pp. 100 - 101.

\textsuperscript{45} the indeterminate precision of narrative
child using my name from birth; which in theory sounds quite reasonable? The results however were that he could not say “lyndall” and used “lily” until he went to school, subsequently insisting on using the same term as his peers. He now uses “lyndall” only when differentiating me from the other mothers. The rest of my children (non biological) have clung to “lily” as their special term for me; that is, I can’t be “mum” as there is already someone in their life that they refer to by that title and I can’t be “lyndall” because they need a title of endearment that expresses their relationship with me. I have learnt as a mother, that children have their own stories. I can guide their plot development but they are the narrators in their own lives.

My experience of parenting initiated the indeterminate precision of narrative. A small exhibition of these works was shown in 2006 under the title watching. The title of this show reflects my attitude to parenting. I watch. I watch to make sure my child and his friends are safe. I watch to make sure they are behaving. I watch to make sure they are playing fair. I watch to make sure they have hats on. I watch the time for all sorts of logistical reasons that include drop offs and pickups, meal times, study times, etcetera, etcetera add infinitum. I watch from the studio, kitchen, laundry, car or beach. My role is to watch. This is what I am doing. They are doing something quite different however. Theirs’ is active play. Playing, making, swinging and looking are the titles of these works.

… making narrative

The images were developed using family snap shots. In my watching, I take photographs that record my family as faithfully as possible. I wait until the children become oblivious to my presence in there playing field before I begin taking photographs (Figure 37). I remember such play from my own childhood. It was a world were parents disappeared as my imagination filled the visual world. On my return to the studio, journal sketches (Figure 38) and working drawings (Figures 39 and 40) are then carried out in order to gain some sense of how the works might develop. I then digitally manipulate and crop the photograph (Figure 37). This process was developed through a previous body of work carried out during the research period, titled ellipsis (Figures 34 to 36). Small collage preliminary works were scanned into digital files, manipulated and projected at a larger scale onto prepared grounds. The underpainting for these works was executed rapidly (approximately 6 hours) with acrylic paint and then painstakingly painted with oil paints (approximately 40 to 80 hours). The technique developed through this process allowed me to retain a resemblance to the “original” image while permitting me the freedom to play with the materiality of the paint (see chapter 5, packaging technologies and potentials).

The decisions made in the studio become less distinct and more process driven as the materiality of making advances. For example: (Figure 41) the initial work for the indeterminate precision of narrative was not resolved for various reasons. This work was too literal in its translation of the photograph. I had tied myself to likeness. This is an inevitable trap for a painter painting her child. It is one

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81 Exhibition details are available in appendix 1: research publications curriculum vitae, appendix 2: research publication details and on www.lyndallas.com.
82 Barbara Bolt defines representation art in the visual arts as opposed to abstract or so-called non-representational art and tending to be associated with realism or figuration. However critics of this definition state that representation cannot be conceived so literally; rather, representation posits a particular relation to, or way of thinking about the world. I agree with Bolt that art is a representational practice and its products are representations. Barbara Bolt, op. cit, pp. 11 - 35.
Figures 34 to 36: (clockwise from bottom), Preliminary collage, you say ..., you say ..., 110cm x 110cm, oil on linen, 2005 and detail.

the indeterminate precision of narrative
Figure 37: digital manipulation sequence; (top left and clockwise) initial photograph, (top left and clockwise), digital manipulation and cropping.

the indeterminate precision of narrative
of the reasons I chose the subject matter. Previously I had worked in a more expanded field i.e. cultural signifiers had been used in the work to indicate a broad view of the lives “we” lead rather than the life “I” lead. The subject matter was chosen for this set of works based on my previous hesitation to speak directly to my everyday life. All works made are subjective however working with images of my child (not someone else’s child) was/is loaded with an additional somatic and mnemonic burden. Memory and remembering are complicated. Bodily memories of a beloved child are subjective. There are all sorts of loves, fears, anxieties and expectations bound up with images of ones child that connect directly to the lived body. I could not step outside of the story I was telling in the studio to take on the role of dissociated narrator. While I had intentionally given myself the task of telling this story I had not anticipated the struggle I would have with the imagery. Decisions are made in the studio that depends on choice. These include formal qualities such as structure, colour, tone and value. Aesthetic choices are also made. I felt that I was fighting with the representation of my child and his friends and the paint. There where too many colours and it seemed to be an illustration of children rather than a painting. What I was trying for is that space where realism and abstraction within representation practice blurs. How far is it that you can push realism before it disappears?

83 Film taken by my child of his friends swinging in the tree can be viewed on lyndalladams.com in the 2007 section.
84 Examples of these works can be viewed on lyndalladams.com in the sections 2004, 2005 and 2006.
85 A list of artists that have influenced this facet of my arts-practice include: Cy Twombly, Christopher Wool, Lindy Lee, Yoyo Kusama, Michael Nelson Jagamara (specifically the New Expressions series from 1998) and Tim Noble and Sue Webster (specifically Kiss of Death, 2003 from the shadow images which had an enormous impact when I saw the work in 2005 at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum in New York).

Figure 38: Studio process, the *indeterminate precision of narrative* series: journal sketch.
I began the painting again, limited the colour range and simplified the subject matter. I also began another two canvases (Figures 46 and 47). This enabled me to separate myself from the imagery somewhat and engage with the performance of making. I was less tied to likeness or resemblance and more to the performance of making. Playing 1 (Figure 45) retains some of that “struggle” and on reflection seems “forced”. One reason this could be so is that I was using a size 00 brush which limited my wrist movement. Subsequent works were painted using size 1 to 5 brushes, which allowed for a less restrictive range of wrist movement resulting in the marks of the brush reading as looser and more gestural. With each subsequent set a rhythm of making was entered into; a performative process of making. This is a more a rhizomic process than a linear one always in the process of becoming, sending offshoots and proliferations. While the resultant works are autonomous forms they are also a part of social histories. How can they not be? I cannot step outside the concerns of my time. What happens in the translation between the performative act of painting (and the material thinking) is the trace or object of that making; the artefact of that performativity.

… installation narrative

The installation of the indeterminate precision of narrative depended not solely on the work but on the architectural space offered by the gallery/museum. Decisions regarding how to install the work and by using which of the multiplicity of strategies had to be imagined and resolved. These decisions encompass choices made within the studio and beyond the studio walls, as the space for exhibiting the research outcomes was set.

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86 Barbara Bolt, op. cit, p. 39.
the indeterminate precision of narrative
Figure 43: (top) and Figure 44: (bottom), Installation views: *the indeterminate precision of narrative*, Grafton Regional Gallery, 2007.
In order for the viewer to enter the installation space, it is assumed that a particular set of knowledge is present. This knowledge includes the understanding that the clean white walls of the contemporary art museum are anything but blank. Quite the reverse in fact, they are loaded with significance. We have grown as accustomed to reading the museum walls as much as the artworks that they house. As an ordered conglomeration of signs, the museum functions as a frame that contextualises, constructs and reconstructs particular meaning. The museum is a link in the semiotic chain of associations and references.

The surroundings, amid which anything is seen, can and do direct the viewer’s response. There is always a gap between our intention and the reception or perception of that intention by that viewer. By intent I do not pursue any concrete meaning or reading as I believe meaning to be fluid, dynamic, provisional, layered and associative. The installation is given shape by the viewer’s point of view and invites multiple reader positioning. This does not mean that it does so without intent, preference or discrimination. My intention was to create a number of spaces that interacted while strengthened the overall narrative. The larger space was intended to be more open and active (Figure 43) while the two smaller space where intended to be more intimate and resemble a cubby house (Figures 42 and 44). However I acknowledge and invite the viewer to produce meaning rather than simply consume it.

Paint on canvas, acts as a skin that binds the surface, the acrylic works are more open and porous without closure or resolution. This enables the viewer to move in and out of the work and to take up other positions, even perhaps to lose a sense of the boundaries. The all-over patterning of the painting intends to shift the figure/ground relationship. The pairing of the painted surface and the acrylic surface was intended to disrupt and disturb the viewer’s sense of security: disrupt and disturb the relationship between surface and ground, positive and negative, literal and figure rule.

Film of the installation can be viewed on lyndalladams.com.

Figure 45: (this page) playing 1, oil on linen, 100 x 170 cm, 2006. Figure 46: (page 56) playing 2, oil on linen, 100 x 170 cm, 2006 and Figure 47: (page 57) process landscape, oil on linen, 100 x 170 cm, 2006.
This chapter discusses the development of large format digital prints and the web site http://www.lyndalladams.com/ as integral element of my arts-practice-led research throughout the PhD research candidacy and the packaging of the outcomes of that research in the form of exhibition/publication and web site. The research methodology associated with this area necessitates the interaction of the researcher not only with research material but also with 'experts in the field'. This chapter also identifies and enquires into research surrounding the world-wide-web as a marker that explores rhizomic story telling structures at work in the art world. Moreover, what this might mean for arts-practice-led research given the reconceptualisation of the body under the influence of information technologies on the internet and in cyberspace, allow subjects to migrate, change identities, and communicate.

**collaboration with industry**

My interest in large format prints has developed over time. Its genesis occurred as a result of my interest in contemporary theoretical debates surrounding the original and the copy and in the inception of DIY technologies in the early 1990s as computer technologies became more accessible to the general public. It also became possible to produce works without the aid of computer technicians or specialists. However, the large format digital print format does require a thorough knowledge of various materials including plexiglass and cellulose/nylon/acetate compounds outside of this researcher’s expertise as the various printing presses and software associated with large format digital printing is prohibitively expensive.

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89 For a more thorough discussion regarding the original and the copy see Lyndall Adams, *not so blind reverence*, Master of Arts Thesis Statement, Southern Cross University, 2001, pp. 30-31.

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Figure 48: (this page), *self portrait: useless dolly*, 6 colour ink on latex/nylon/cellulose compound, 240 cm x 90 cm, 2003 and Figure 49: (next page), *self portrait: correction fluid dolly*, 6 colour ink on latex/nylon/cellulose compound, 400 cm x 88 cm, 2003.
for the small editions required. As a result, I have developed working relationships with various commercial printeries on the North Coast of NSW in order to outsource the printing of digital files onto various materials. This relationship is dependant on what knowledge, software and hardware the printer can provide outside of my field of expertise. This is an interdisciplinary and interconnected approach to other fields of research.

**self portrait: dollies**

The *self portrait: dolly* series (2002 to current) where initiated by my interest in notions of self-portraiture. The computer had become a considerable aspect of my arts-practice during this period. I use it to form ideas. I use it to generate prints that either become autonomous entities or models for works made in other areas of the studio. *Self portrait: useless dolly* (Figure 48) is the sixth such image printed as a large format print developed through the PhD research candidacy.

In the *self portraits* series, I construct myself in various roles and play with the genre of the self-portrait; confusing authenticity; bringing woman and artist into communication in an image beyond the logic of mirroring. In this manifestation, representations of self are through my collection of small dolls gathered over a period of time. In this case, I have scanned and printed the doll at my height (170 cm) + what I imagine the dolls leg extensions would measure. *Self portrait: Useless dolly* represents/pictures me more accurately than any likeness could; after all, being useful is not everything.

It was my intention to push the available technology to its limits. *Self portrait: correction fluid dolly* was printed at 4 metres in height (Figure 49). These particular digital prints use as their support a compound known as latex/cellulose/nylon. This print technology was developed to print banners for commercial use with a maximum width of 900 cm and length of 10 metre. In theory, a 10-metre print is possible, however, the software to drive that size print is costly and to my knowledge 4 metres is the maximum length of any North Coast NSW Printer. The compound is very strong, light and water fast, have an archival life of 10 years (5 years if hung outside) and if crumpled the creases fall out when hung. This material was selected not only for its robustness but also for its fetishist qualities in that the surface reads similarly to rubber or plastic and yet has a patina similar to artist quality paper. The prints are also extremely easy to transport, that is, they role up into a tube and are light weight. While I am very happy with these prints they do have a number of shortcomings. The major one being that other than stretching the works onto a stretcher they are not particularly user friendly in installation. They tend to turn in at the edges or role up at the bottom unless they are pinned solidly down, even though

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this gives them some lightness in installation as any breeze in the installation space moves the works. A hanging system was developed in collaboration with an expert framer and outsourced to plexiglass manufacturers, comprising of two strips of clear Perspex screwed to the top and bottom of the work. This system allowed the work to hang on the wall from the top strip and weighs the work down at the bottom. However, the larger the print the more rolling occurred at the outside edge, which led me to research alternate materials.

camouflage

Camouflage has traditionally been considered as the art of concealing something to blend in with its surroundings. Camouflage veils shapes by suggesting various other potential forms. Camouflage design also reflects national and regional differences. Camouflage is always specific to the area of its use. The patterns chosen by the military reflect the area of combat and the season. The patterns favored by hunters are extremely specific to terrain and season. They are not just shapes abstracted from the nature world, but processes abstracted from that environment. It is a reminder that because all design involves choice it inevitably also involves style.

Artists and fashion designers have long played with camouflage patterns. Instead of staying concealing in many of these cases, camouflage succeeds by being noticed. Socially and aesthetically, camouflage is more and more often


92 Many artists served as designers of camouflage during World War II including Arshile Gorky, László Moholy-Nagy and Ellsworth Kelly. Andy Warhol’s *Self-portrait with Camouflage* (1986) also employed this strategy.

Figure 50: Installation view: *Pause Play*, Grafton Regional Gallery, 2006.
about advertising allegiance. Despite its functionalist status, camouflage has always had style. Camouflage patterns now decorate skateboards and cook books. The concept of camouflage has become a part of the everyday with the use of bright fluorescent colors instead of the more subtle use of tones that mimic the natural world. Camouflage has now become an integral part of visual culture. It is however worth remembering camouflages heritage and its continuing cultural significance as designs that have the practical effect of saving lives.93

The **camouflage sequence** works also feed into the notions of the mother narrator (see chapter 4: the indeterminate precision of narrative). As a parent, fear is a large factor in connecting the images of children at play

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Figures 56 to 58: (clockwise from left), *camouflage sequence* development. (the red square represents the approximate location of the cropped digital file below.)
and camouflage sequence patterns and alludes to the chilling fact that my children will grow into adults who will be involved in a world where wars and escalating violence exists in many forms. I cannot protect or shield them from this fact any more than I can direct their future political allegiances. I can simply express my hopes and fears, and allude to the wider context of camouflage in this way.

camouflage sequence

The ellipsis94 and pause play95 exhibitions were developed in tandem. While these two exhibitions or research areas seem incongruous, arts-practice-led research emerges through material processes, which are based on tacit knowledge and the alternative logic of practice in real time; their precise operations cannot be predetermined96. The impact of this multiple research strategy was a significant breakthrough in the research process allowing considerable advancement through practice. It is at this point that juxtaposing painted surfaces and printed surfaces became apparent. Ellipsis allowed me to research various painting techniques with oil paint and projection while pause play enhanced my technical knowledge of advanced digital software. Conceptually and theoretically both of these elements propelled the research to a more advanced level of enquiry.

Pause play allowed me to develop the large format digital prints further. It had occurred to me that Fiona Fell’s97 ceramic work would not be shown to advantage against the black surfaces of the rubber dolly works. I had toyed with the idea of changing the ground colours to a “clay coloured” surface but concluded that clear plexiglass had a number of benefits including reflection (Figure 50) which would integrate the ceramic pieces into the slick acrylic surfaces. It also eliminated the installation headaches associated with the latex/cellulose/nylon compound mentioned earlier. I began to see the two ways of generating imagery as two different techniques rather than two distinctly different disciplines.

The painted surface technique used in ellipsis was developed further in the watching98 series and in the indeterminate precision of narrative series (see chapter 4). During the process of making, I noticed a camouflage pattern developing in the all over patterning of the paint (Figure 51). The works for The O’Grady sisters redrawn: a contemporary view of five woman artists from the collection exhibition developed through appropriation of photographed and scanned images from watercolours made by Gladys and Doris O’Grady. Similar camouflage patterns were emerging in these works printed as oversized digital prints on 1 cm thick, clear acrylic (Figure 52). It was at this time that notions of including acrylic panels in the indeterminate precision of narrative exhibition were envisaged.

I began the camouflage sequence works with preliminary sketches (Figure 53) and studies (Figures 54 and 55).99 These were then

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94 See appendices 1 and 2 for exhibition details.
95 See appendices 1 and 2 for exhibition details.
97 Pause play was a collaborative exhibition at Grafton Regional Gallery in 2006 with collaborating artist Fiona Fell.
98 See appendices 1 and 2 for exhibition details.
99 The pink preliminary study developed on recollection of a conversation with a young cousin who wanted to join the Brownies. She bemoaned the brown uniform and only wished that a pink one could be substituted.
Figure 59: Installation sequence, playing 3 (i), Grafton Regional Gallery, April 2007.
developed into digital files (Figures 56 to 58) that were outsourced for printing to specialist printers. The digital files were generated from digital photographs taken of the paintings in various stages of resolution. The photographs were then cropped and various digital filters were applied to exaggerate the camouflage patterning.

The face of the acrylic works are mirror finished surfaces and printed onto the back. The front surface is protected from scratching during the printing process and subsequent transportation by adhesive brown paper. As a result, neither the printer nor I see the final print until they are installed (Figure 59). This requires a considerable degree of interpellation on my part in order to envisage the final print and the installation strategy.

While I am satisfied with the outcomes of the digital print development to this stage, there are a number of research areas as yet to be developed. This next phase would be to source a printery that has the software to print at a 10-metre length. Another is the installation of the acrylic works in differing configurations. While these works were developed to sit relatively close to the paintings from which they are sources, a different installation would develop different meanings.

*world-wide-web*

My interests in the dissemination of image information and how it is received across media led me to the www as a site of research. http://www.lyndalladams.com/ is the outcome or that research. The questions I asked of this facet initially involved producing a digital gallery that could transform the way research publications/exhibitions were experienced, appreciated and understood. I was interested in how the space would be set up, who would access the site and for what purposes. I was also interested in Andre Malraux's museum without walls.

There is no doubt that with the emergence of the Internet Malraux's concept of the museum without walls has been realised. Images float free from their origins and practitioners and curators alike have utilised the virtual space for explorations around the production of digital galleries and yet there is a wider framework for Malraux's idea. Its literal equivalent is the digital gallery, but the museum without walls directly underlines the very properties of web technologies. However where Walter Benjamin saw a definite rupture of the museum by mechanical reproduction (shatters tradition and liquidates aura), Malraux saw its indefinite expansion (provides means to reassemble the broken bits of tradition into one meta-tradition of global styles).

… it seems that rather than a digital reordering underwrite for arts practice art museum and art history an appendix is appearing. Galleries, artists and the arts industry in general have an added task in designing, uploading and maintaining web sites. Are there fewer visitors to the real space works/museums/galleries? Is there a more informed public because of these appendices? Is this simply a marketing and promotion strategy?

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100 One of the ways I have enhanced this interpellation process is to have my main printery technician adjust my computer monitor to his print colour settings which means that colour interpellation is kept to minimum.


102 Hal Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

103 *ibid.*
lyndall adams

research: the indeterminate precision of narrative

Phd thesis statement

biography

contact: lyndalladams@bigpond.com
While web design is based on a taxonomic system it does demonstrate how the concepts of the rhizome works in the actual art world. What cultural epistemology might a digital reordering underwrite for arts-practice?

Foucault also associated this moment with Manet and the museum (as well as Flaubert and the library) in this well-known formulation: "every painting now belongs within the squared and massive surface of painting and all literary works are confined to the indefinite murmur of words." In many ways, this "squared and massive surface of painting" is sublated - transgressed and trumped - in the Museum without Walls …

lyndalladams.com

Due to the nature of the project, research was undertaken in web design and delivery. The decisions I made regarding the design of the web site were aesthetic with a clear aim of chronicling the PhD research period. Decisions also had to be made in regards to:

- the domain name
- whether to be a .com or a .com.au
- which search string to register and how often this should be updated
- which HTML colours to use

I wanted the website lyndalladams.com to give the impression of simplicity, a clean look, uncluttered by excess paraphernalia, elaborate fonts or coloured pages. It is paired down to the essential elements necessary for the delivery of information in image and text. I wanted all of the information for each section to remain in the same screen, that is, no scrolling screens. However, this clean look made the building of the web site complex. The web site works like a Russian doll (Figure 61) in that as each image or text is clicked, a pop-up is delivered. This meant that in excess of 100 web pages had to be prepared individually, all based on the original home page design.

While the data collected at this stage is limited, some interesting statistics have emerged regarding who is looking at the web site. The statistical information gathered since the uploading of the images and film into lyndalladams.com are included in Appendices 3.

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104 Barbara Bolt, op. cit., p. 39.
105 Hal Foster, op. cit., p. 80.
106 Associated with this decision was how much personal information to include. In the end, my email address is all that appears and to date I have had one email from the web site.
107 The decision to go with .com was based on a number of rationales. Firstly, the www is a global resource and secondly, my experience of previous searches for specific information, for example, on preparing for a recent trip to Arosa in Switzerland I had searched for accommodation with no results. On our arrival in Zurich, a similar search yielded exactly what I wanted. All of these websites ended in .ch and were not searched by Google. Also considered was whether I wanted people viewing the web site to know where I was based. This was considered for a variety of reasons including whether I want to be searched (and hence categorised) as an Australian contemporary artist or simply a contemporary artist.
108 On the 22 June 2007 a simple Google search of lyndall adams delivered lyndalladams.com as no 3 in a list of 51700 after the Visual Arts Network and Southern Cross University Staff pages.
109 HTML colours can be defined as a hexadecimal notation for the combination of Red, Green, and Blue colour values (RGB). Some years ago, when most computers only supported 256 different colours, a list of 216 Web Safe Colours was suggested as a Web standard. Most computers today have the ability to display millions of different colours, however, the 216 cross-browser colour palette was created to ensure that all computers would display the colours correctly when running a 256 colour palette.
110 Documentation is delivered via a scrolling screen by necessity i.e. a 20 or more paged pdf documents popping up by individual pages would not be conducive to reading.
111 All web pages in lyndalladams.com were designed and built by me. Print Garage uploaded the website.
Figure 61: lyndalladams.com, web page pop-ups, Russian doll effect.

packaging technologies and potentials
Taw Adams-Flynn shot all of the film in this section of the web site\footnote{http://www.lyndalladams.com/2007/html/2007ipnfilm.html}. Taw is the main protagonist in the indeterminate precision of narrative exhibition and introduces us to the way he sees the world via this film footage. They have a particular look and feel to them – more Blair Witch Project than Russian Ark. The film jumps around as he walks/runs through the space of the exhibition and introduces some of the characters, the artist and his hiccups. Audible are his footsteps, his breathing (heavy at times) and other voices in the room. There is also an odd perspective to this film as he has the taken the film with the camera at his waste height. The zoom comes in and out of focus and whirls around the room at times while at others he seems to be either playing with the camera or to have taken a moment to reflect. We are very aware of this narrator as a character in the film. The film sequence; Swinging gives us an insight into this world, a world I remember vividly from my own childhood. This particular film was included for its relationship to the paintings swinging 1, 2, 3 & 4.

I enjoy his playfulness with the installation of the work. A different narrative is played out that engages with the familiar space of the gallery and introduces the installation of the artwork to us through another’s eyes. The dynamic run through space challenged my sense of the work at once trivialising the space and endearing the installation to us through a sense of intimacy and ease.\footnote{The space created was at once crushing and tunnel visioned while simultaneously creating a sense of quiet meditation, similar to walking through Richard Serra’s snake. While I do not equate the film nor the installation space with The Matter of Time, Richard Serra’s statement is apt; “The meaning of this installation does not exist independently from the viewer’s experience: therefore each person will become the subject of this installation. There is an unlimited sense of individual experience, but they all take place over time.” I was fortunate enough to walk through Richard Serra’s, The Matter of Time exhibition at the Guggenheim Bilbao in January 2006 with my family. Taw spent as long as I did with each of the pieces; although his means of engagement was quite different i.e. he alternately lay down inside the spaces created by the curved metal structures or skated on his wheeled shoes through the narrow openings. This exhibition had a profound and lasting effect on all of us.} This is a living through the installation space in all of its meaningful interaction with the narrator. At once, questioning the inscriptions laid down in the work and confronting my own text for the desires I inscribe and for the investments I have shaped through telling my own stories.

These short films can be looked as collaborations between my son and me. Their transformative power lies in the impact of the unedited film brought about by his embodied involvement with the video camera and the artworks. It is through this set of films that I am enabled as a mother to speak with reference to oppositional desires and fantasies that challenge dominance from within representation and meaning rather than from the place that the phallocentric symbolic does its best to wall off and render inactive by denying it representational support\footnote{Griselda Pollock, op. cit., pp. 228 – 229.}.

The film of the installation and opening talks provide a context and setting for the research publication and provides an archive for the terms of the discourse surrounding that publication\footnote{Hal Foster, op. cit., pp. 65 -71.}. This is a very different experience to the embodied experience of moving through real space in the museum/gallery but does provide a milieu in this arena of instant communication striped of all perspective.
potentials

While the potential for instant communication of all information and any image anywhere has been realised, one does have to know the keywords in any given search string and one has to have access to a computer and internet in the first place. Is information technology exacerbating the accelerating inequality between peoples, classes and individuals and more and more shaping closed knowledge communities\(^\text{116}\) or simply a tool that is used as a part of the performative process of bodily engagement which is used and produces to reveal its own kind of knowledge\(^\text{117}\)? I have no conclusions at this point. The debate continues on the one hand as a digital reordering transforms artifacts into information, fragmenting the object and dissolving its aura absolutely. And, on the other hand, any dissolution of aura only increases our demand for it; the artwork might become more auratic, not less, as it becomes more simulacra in the electronic archive\(^\text{118}\).


\(^{117}\) Barbara Bolt, op. cit., pp. 61 - 65.

\(^{118}\) Hal Foster, op. cit., p. 80.
conclusion

The exhibition/publication *the indeterminate precision of narrative* was the culmination of the research period. Multiple exhibitions were published through the research period (see Appendices 1 and 2). These exhibitions engaged with the various indeterminate, adaptable and yet simultaneously precise and truthful nature of story telling. The aim of the research was to respond to complex narrative structure’s role in positioning visual images of the body. There is no particular story that can describe our lives exactly as they are. To begin a narrative we retell stories from the past in order to articulate our narrative present. The narrative structures the exhibitions explore, focuses on images and objects that speak to the body in all of its complexity.

The significance of the research lies in its response to and engagement with contemporary theoretic debates that currently surround images of the body. The body in contemporary art is represented variously as vulnerable, wounded, gendered, sexual, fragmented, horrific, uncanny, abject and excessive. It is important for artists to re-frame the role of self-portraiture, the body and the narrator in art as social constructs in order to subvert the traditional demand for mimetic truth by devising alternative forms of self-representation, which function outside the discourse of conventional, gendered art historical discourse. By performing the texts of everyday life, the body becomes not a product but a processor of everyday life.

The research conducted made use of traditional and contemporary image making tools such as oil painting juxtaposed with large format acrylic prints sourced through digital means and includes the design and development of a website that publishes the research outcomes. The research advances our general knowledge in the innovative use of materials that speak to conventional and contemporary accounts of the body. While oil paint on linen are conventional supports within a western patriarchal tradition digital technology allows new and different ways of revealing and processing imagery.

What was revealed through the research period that could not have been revealed through any other method of enquiry was the material thinking of the studio. Materials, methods and conceptual frameworks shape and determine the kind of knowledge that is produced through arts-practice-led research. Time spent in the studio performing the research has significant implications for arts-practice. The aim of the research was to consider how the methodologies employed impact on the lived body. This action is identified as performative. The methodologies identified for use in the research were arts-practice-led research and involved a process of information gathering; including non-linear systems that are inclusive, chaotic, and holistic; various visual and multi-media methods of selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication including journals, digital photographs, proofs and drafts. Arts-practice-led research is pluralistic in approach; uses multi-method techniques tailored to the individual project; reflexivity is
acknowledged and the interaction of the researcher with research material is recognised. Within this field the researcher reflects-in-action and reflects-on-action and is adaptive. These systems explored how my ontological position and the methodologies outlined were catalysts for studio production.

In the installation space, the acrylic works reflected off each image surface, constantly interrupting and interrogating every other surface of the works; at once integrating and creating a schism between surfaces and patinas. This allows the viewer to arrive not at a single medium or image but at continual mediation between images producing stories that bridge the gap between the performative act and the artefact/object of that making. Process and material thinking are transformed in this way, due to the influence each has on the other. By constantly informing each other, meaning is continually relativised. We collude culturally and individually to make different meanings. The relationship between meanings, I structure here as a process, a becoming, a movement, constantly transforming through interaction.

Creative works according to the performative research paradigm are the outcome of the research. In this paradigm, the research process initiates movement and transformation. It is performative. My research was carried out using strategies carried out through arts-practice, using predominant methodologies and specific methods familiar to practitioners of practice-led\textsuperscript{119} research. This affirms the primacy of practice in the research methods in there own right (see chapter 1, 2 and 3). While acknowledging that a performative research paradigm is not new, the potential for presenting documentation (exhibition, www and exegesis) in media rich outputs have taken the research findings into spaces that stand apart from other research paradigms while articulating the requirements of the research for transparency. It is becoming evident that while practice-led research builds directly out of a researcher’s professional practice, it is more than an individual's professional practice alone. With its emergence, practice-led research promises to raise the level of critical practice and theorising around practice in a more rigorous and open way than professional practice alone is able to achieve. While material forms of practice as outcomes of performative research without doubt are used as evidence, the exegesis or thesis statement as an interpretation of the complexity of creative work contributes to knowledge in an emerging research paradigm.\textsuperscript{120}

While arts-practice-led research is content to answer a question with another question. Practice as research is identified as a ‘generating’ instrument. Research processes are tailored to respond to practice and practice to research, continually re-orientating itself to refine the research question through reflexive processes. Meaning is never closed. The process I go through in making the works is the process of story telling. The dialogue with which I engage in the studio however is between images, materials and performative processes. This narrative is ongoing and opens up the potential for further research in this area …

\textsuperscript{119} Throughout this document, I have used arts-practice-led research when referring to my own research and practice-led research when referring to the emerging vocabulary of the performative research paradigm.

\textsuperscript{120} Brad Haseman, “Foucault's 'What is an Author': Towards a Critical Discourse of Practice as Research” in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt. (eds.), op. cit., pp. 145 – 157.
The stories I tell are quite simple - or are they. These stories speak to my life in regional NSW.

I watch my children and their friends play in the trees that run down to Lake Wooloweyah at the back of the family home.

The younger children watch the older children climb the trees, tie the ropes and then swing out into the sky. They watch and learn so that when they are big enough they too will be able swing. They fall, laugh; argue about whose turn it is and how it should be done.

They are oblivious to my watching.

The games they play in that landscape are perhaps influenced by popular culture and ... perhaps not.

In play, we learn how to do things.

When I play, I am in the studio working out the world across various media.

When I watch them play – there are sticks ... sticks that stand in for guns, lightsabers, swords and knives and there are of course ... cubby houses and swings.

Patterns form in the landscape and around their small bodies.

I ask myself questions about the games we play as children that prepare us for the adult world ...

The stories I tell are structured around narratives that are likened to a rhizome; connected in all ways but always becoming, never arriving.

Within my arts-practice, I attempt to speak about the female body, the lived body that is determined and specific.

The images speak to the lively concerns of femininity, the day-to-day runnings of the lived body in a state of flux, defined and redefined by changing practices and discourses.

One of the ways I measure that state of flux is by the growth and activity of the children around me and by the more gradual changes in the landscape.


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