

# AN ENCOUNTER WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE:

embodied explorations of walking through film

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## Abstract

This visual arts research project is underpinned by the notion that lived experience is pre-cognitive and pre-reflective, always already unfolding in everyday life. Particular consideration is given to the lived body as intrinsic to experience and mediatory between self and world, and the durational nature of lived time. The practical investigation takes a phenomenological approach in focusing on the habitual modality of routinely walking from A to B, with the aim of attempting to understand my experiences while walking to and from work as examples of lived experience. Methods and processes that are reflective of a sense-making approach to understanding the livedness of everyday experience are employed. Filmic encounter is used to investigate ways of translating these experiences for the viewer and an embodied approach to filmic experience is explored through notions of affect and haptic visuality.

This thesis is constituted as practice based artwork 80% accompanied by an exegesis 20%.

# Introduction

Over the past few years I have been fortunate enough to be able to walk to work on a regular basis where previously I had been confined to the encapsulating interior of my car. When I first began walking to work I experienced feelings of familiarity and engagement with my surroundings and a satisfaction of moving through an already known environment. As I repeated the walk again and again the nature of my experiences changed as I adopted a more habitual, and ultimately more distracted and disinterested attitude. When mentioning to friends and colleagues that I had walked to work, or was walking home, I was often greeted with surprise, or even admiration. At times people would mention 'I saw you walking today', as though it was something special, an achievement. At other times I would get the impression someone thought I had an ulterior motive for walking, to get some exercise perhaps. I came to realise that to a degree the simple act of walking had become obsolete in the contemporary vehicle-dominated landscape and was valued as something extraordinary, rather than ordinary and mundane. The focus of this visual arts thesis project is to attempt to understand and draw attention to some of the experiential aspects of the modality of walking.

This exegesis will elucidate some of the ideas and processes underpinning the studio research leading up to the final exhibition. In doing so it connects ideas to do with the embodied and temporal aspects of walking, the livedness of everyday life and the immersive potential of filmic encounter in order to draw attention to some of the experiential aspects of walking in a habitual manner, when the walking is a practical means of getting from A to B. With a focus on filmic encounter the research situates itself amidst recent art practice that explicitly engages the viewer's body as a whole, to a degree critiquing the potential, or limitations

of visibility, and drawing attention to what film analyst Laura Marks (1998) describes as 'a reconfiguration of the senses' (p. 334), a reconsideration of 'seeing' as multisensory.

*Chapter one* deals with theoretical issues to do with lived experience in relation to the act of walking. Existential phenomenology is linked to theories of everyday life and the embodied and temporal dimensions of experience.

Initial attempts to represent my experiences in paint were unsuccessful and the decision was made early in the project to instead attempt to evoke these experiences through filmic encounter. *Chapter two* outlines the rationale for repositioning the research away from painting and in the field of filmic encounter, linking this practice to phenomenological theories established in chapter one through a discussion of affect and haptic visibility. I wish to note, however, that my approach to filmic form still contained some of the sensibilities of a painter.

*Chapter three* discusses how contextual research presented in the first two chapters impacted on studio practice, and outlines the methodological approach. This chapter discusses the methods and processes that became consistent throughout the project as a sense-making approach to attempting to come to terms with my experiences and explore them through filmic form.

*Chapter four* provides a commentary on selected works and uses these to highlight key stages of the project and discuss how ideas and processes unfolded as the project developed.

# Chapter One    The lived experience of walking

## 1.1 The livedness of being

Drawing upon the ideas of existential phenomenology this project explores the lived experience associated with walking as experience that is pre-reflective or pre-linguistic, experience before it has been formulated in judgements and expressed in outward linguistic form (Van Manen, 2007). This involves a corporeal knowing that occurs prior to the objectification of self and world.

Daily activity is not characteristically determined by conscious choices and aware states of mind, and typically we operate in modes of being that we take for granted. Drawing attention to the pre-cognitive aspects of walking to and from work involves finding things always already in motion. Heidegger (1996, p. 49) uses the term 'Dasein' or 'being-in-the-world' to describe this essential underlying structure of human existence. As Dasein, Heidegger (1996) describes us as coping beings, finding ourselves in the midst of the world as it unfolds around us, and having to start coping from there. Although we can draw attention to this underlying realm of lived experience, Heidegger (1996) argues that the actuality of lived experience occurs as an intangible constant, beneath the surface of consciousness, as it is always already happening.

It follows that reflective experience presents itself as always partial, fragmented and incomplete. Attempting to understand the lived experience of walking therefore involves the pre-condition of already being caught up in a situation where person and world

are inseparable. Seamon (2000, p. 160) suggests that ‘a major phenomenological challenge is to describe this person-world intimacy in a way that legitimately escapes any subject-object dichotomy.’ Understanding lived experience therefore requires a certain sense of wonder and openness to the world, while at the same time being conscious of a phenomenological attitude of observing oneself experiencing (Finlay, 2008).

## 1.2 Notions of everydayness associated with walking from A to B

The routine, habitual aspects of walking to and from work as a rhythmic, practical absorption in an everyday activity associate this project with theory on everyday life. Like Heidegger’s Dasein, theories of everyday life propose a non-intellectual relationship with the world that operates as a taken-for-granted backdrop to conscious activity (Felski, 1999). As a quotidian engagement with living, walking from A to B does not have objectively given qualities, but is a lived and embodied relationship. Cultural theorist Rita Felski (1999) discusses a habitual, distracted mode of experience when explaining attitudes towards the everyday, and describes everyday life as “the routine act of conducting one’s day-to-day existence without making it an object of conscious attention” (p. 27).

The inattentive states associated with ideas of everyday life can facilitate a more immersive, pre-cognitive relationship with the world and an adherence to the familiar, where activities are carried out ‘through somatic rather than conscious memory’ (McCracken, 2002, p. 157). Agnes Heller (as cited in Felski, 2002) describes this inattentiveness as an indispensable coping mechanism to avoid the bombardment of the senses that would occur otherwise. The routinisation of everyday activity creates

daily, or weekly rhythms and repetitions described by Crang (2005) as a 'ballet of lines of motion' (p. 193) allowing us to make sense of, but also cope with, the world through embodied everyday practices.

### 1.3 The mediatory lived body

The quotidian rhythms of walking from A to B suggest an engagement with the world through corporeal immersion. According to French Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty the body is the 'horizon latent in all our experience...and anterior to every determining thought' (as cited in Finlay, 2006, p. 19). He contends that the body not only connects us to the world around us, but also enables us to understand it. Merleau-Ponty (1968) uses the metaphor of chiasm to describe experience as a co-construction produced through a mutual relationship between self and world:

*We are the world that thinks itself or that the world is at the heart of our flesh... once a body-world relationship is recognised, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside and my inside and its outside. (p. 136).*

He thus blurs the distinction between subject and object, proposing instead a 'mutual permeability and the mutual creation of self and other.' (Hawkins, 2010, p. 324). Merleau-Ponty (1968) argues that inter-subjectivity between self and world is always already occurring.

He positions the body in an in-between state between the virtual and the visible:

*[I] the seer am also visible. What makes the weight, the thickness, the flesh of each color, of each sound, of each tactile texture, of the present, and of the world is the fact that he who grasps them feels himself emerge from them by a sort of coiling up or redoubling, fundamentally homogenous ... a whole virtual center (p. 114-115).*

The inter-subjectivity associated with the livedness of walking suggests a commingling that occurs over time in an on-going process of becoming.

## 1.4 Lived time

Walking's temporal quality renders it conducive to what 19th century French philosopher Henri Bergson (1988) describes as 'duration', the internal experience of lived time that forms the basis of the true self. Existence for Bergson involves experiencing time as 'an endless flow of changes into which we can only artificially distinguish clear-cut states' (Marrati, 2005, p. 1103). Existence does not just occur within the framework of duration, but rather it has duration as its structure. To exist, therefore means to experience time as a transitioning from one state to the next in an almost indecipherable manner. Bergson understood the present as constantly being produced, leaving open an on-going possibility of the emergence of the new (Marrati, 2005).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) similarly proposed that time and existence are inextricably linked and our being is really a process of

becoming where 'the lived present holds a past and a future within its thickness' (p. 275). According to Merleau-Ponty what we have encountered in the past now adheres to us as memories or fragments of forgotten experiences that somehow leave their trace on our being. The intrinsic process of walking, with its intertwining of body, mind, vision and time, can stimulate what Merleau-Ponty would describe as a sense of the continuity of the self amid the flux of the world, and can thereby help define our relation to the world.

Crang (2005) describes routine activities such as walking as 'envelopes of space-time, through which people must pass in order to accomplish their daily business' (p. 192). From this perspective a distracted, disengaged attitude is implied and a subsequent loss of linear time. The routinisation of walking from A to B internalises lived time and encourages an embodied connection with the world that operates outside of measured time. In carving out a familiar route when walking to and from work, space-time is managed by following that same route again and again. There is a layering of lived time through repetition that builds on Merleau-Ponty's concept of the thickness of the present by drawing upon multiple pasts and multiple futures.

## Chapter Two     Filmic encounter and the affective gap

As discussed in the introduction, my initial approach was from the position of a painter and as such early stages of the project attempted to represent lived experience in paint. As the project unfolded it became clear that these attempts were unsatisfying because they did not address some of the durational aspects of lived experience. The decision was made to focus instead on film. This chapter discusses how I have discovered filmic form can be appropriate to evoking, rather than representing, a sense of lived experience and duration.

### 2.1 Filmic encounter

Building upon and folding into the contextual approach outlined in Chapter 1 is a concern for the affective dimensions of the art experience, and the haptic potential of film practice. This concern leads towards methods that encourage an embodied engagement with the materiality of film, where the body becomes involved in a process of 'seeing' that is more than an optical form of vision. Filmic encounter by its nature encourages the viewer to participate fully in an immersive bodily experience, through activation of sensations, vision, sound, movement, time and touch. The medium therefore acts as a kind of portal, or access point, to the pre-cognitive realm of lived experience. The coming together of the body of the viewer and that of the film holds the potential for a process of intertwining to occur, one where clusters of sensations emerge and produce affects, which liberate what is already present, but hidden underneath the everyday.

The merging of seer and seen, subject and object, that occurs in filmic encounter sets up a complex relationship where film co-productively establishes the subject, and the lived body becomes a site for the production of art through affective encounter, extending Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic unfolding into the realm of art. The embodied, pre-reflective nature of the encounter offers the viewer what cultural and geographical theorist Harriet Hawkins (2010) describes as an 'experience of experience', grasped not by the intellect, but by the body in its entirety (p. 324). Film analyst Vivian Sobchack (1992) stresses the interactive character of film viewing:

*Watching a film, we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as see the moved. As viewers, not only do we spontaneously and invisibly perform these existential acts directly for and as ourselves in relation to the film before us, but these same acts are coterminously given to us as the film, as mediating acts of perception-cum-expression we take up and invisibly perform by appropriating and incorporating them into our own existential performance; we watch them as a visible performance distinguishable from, yet included in, our own (p. 10-11).*

Rather than experiencing film as a detached observer, Sobchack argues, the viewer and film participate in a collaborative process through which creative experience can be seen to emerge. She does not separate the senses from intellect, but rather argues that the lived body understands the world pre-cognitively through the senses.

## 2.2 Affect

Filmic encounter holds the potential to create a rupture to the everyday through affect. Seventeenth Century philosopher Baruch Spinoza describes affect as the effect a given object or practice has on its beholder, and on its beholder's becoming. According to art theorist Simon O'Sullivan (2006), our being is in fact made up of a multitude of affects as we navigate our way through lived time and lived experience. What makes the filmic encounter unique is its ability to intensify affects, deterritorialise experience, and take us outside our 'selves' (O'Sullivan, 2006). Filmic practice can therefore be seen as a process of intensifying affects and as a consequence, or as a pretext, creating a rupture in our habitual, lived modes of being. For French philosopher Felix Guattari affective experience is a question of 'reordering ourselves and our relationship to the world, a question of reconfiguration', which involves a 'break in our habitual sense of self and in our habitual responses to the world'... in a process of 'resingularisation' (as cited in O'Sullivan 2006, p. 26-27). Cultural theorist Brian Massumi (1992) claims that 'a set of affects, a portion of the object's essential dynamism, is drawn in, transferred into the substance of the thinking-perceiving body' (p. 36). The body can therefore be seen as a mediatory site of transference, midway between self and world.

According to Bergson (1988) the in-between-ness of the body means that it operates in a gap between stimulus and response, understood by Bergson as 'hesitancy', and it is through an attention to this gap, an opening up of the world beyond the ordinary everyday veneer, that enables creativity to emerge. Following Bergson then we might argue that we operate, as beings in the world, on a certain spatio-temporal register. Through the routinisation of activities we adhere to the familiar and filter out the extraordinary. Filmic encounter, in providing a switching of temporal register (through slow motion, sequence and fragmentation)

and spatial register (through scale), acts as a deterritorialising function, activating a rupture to the everyday, taking the viewer out of mundane consciousness and opening up that which is immanent to experience.

## 2.3 The haptic

The haptic potential in filmic encounter can be seen as a means of enhancing an embodied, pre-reflective engagement with the materiality of the filmic surface. Marks (1998) describes haptic visuality as a bodily form of 'seeing' where tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive functions are brought to the fore. 'Seeing' in this modality is equated with 'touch'. Haptic techniques in film seek an immediate, sensuous, bodily response to the surface of the screen with an emphasis on texture above form (Joy & Sherry, 2003). In this sense, the bodily presence of both viewer and film are retained in the livedness of time. Methods such as changes in focal length, graininess, and effects of under- and over-exposure create an incompleteness in the image that the viewer is then urged to constitute, to 'bring it forth from latency' (Marks, 1998, p. 339). From an existential phenomenological perspective this type of experience is one of mutual exchange where the body of the viewer and the body of the film commingle and effectively enact the encounter in a kind of collaborative becoming.

It follows that a visual medium that appeals on a haptic level must be beheld by the whole body. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) wrote, 'To perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body' (p. 42). Marks (1998) suggests that haptic imagery helps to create an inter-subjective relationship between the viewer and the film because the viewer 'is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer gives up her own sense of separateness from the image' (p. 341).

## Chapter 3 Methods and processes towards filmic encounter

In setting forward a method of phenomenological inquiry based on Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm, educator Max Van Manen (2007) proposes a pathic engagement with the life-world, where the 'pathically tuned body perceives the world in a feeling or emotive modality of being' (p. 21). Such an approach permits us to re-achieve a 'direct and primitive contact with the world' as we experience it, rather than as we conceptualise it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, vii). This project employs the pathic tactic of phenomenological inquiry that encourages an embodied, corporeal engagement with the world. In establishing methods and processes appropriate to the practical investigation I searched for an approach that was reflective of the embeddedness of experiential states, in a way bypassing representation and instead placing emphasis on the tactility of surface, and a direct experiential involvement in the materiality of filmic form.

The methods and processes outlined in this chapter plot out the different stages of the approach to filmic form that evolved during the project and were used towards creating the exhibition work. While the intention here is to outline them in sequential order, it should be noted that aspects of these methods and processes developed and were refined through experimentation as the project unfolded, as is evidenced in chapter 4 of this exegesis.

3.1 provides a diagrammatic description of the approach, while 3.2 discusses key methods and processes in detail.

### 3.1 A processual approach towards filmic encounter

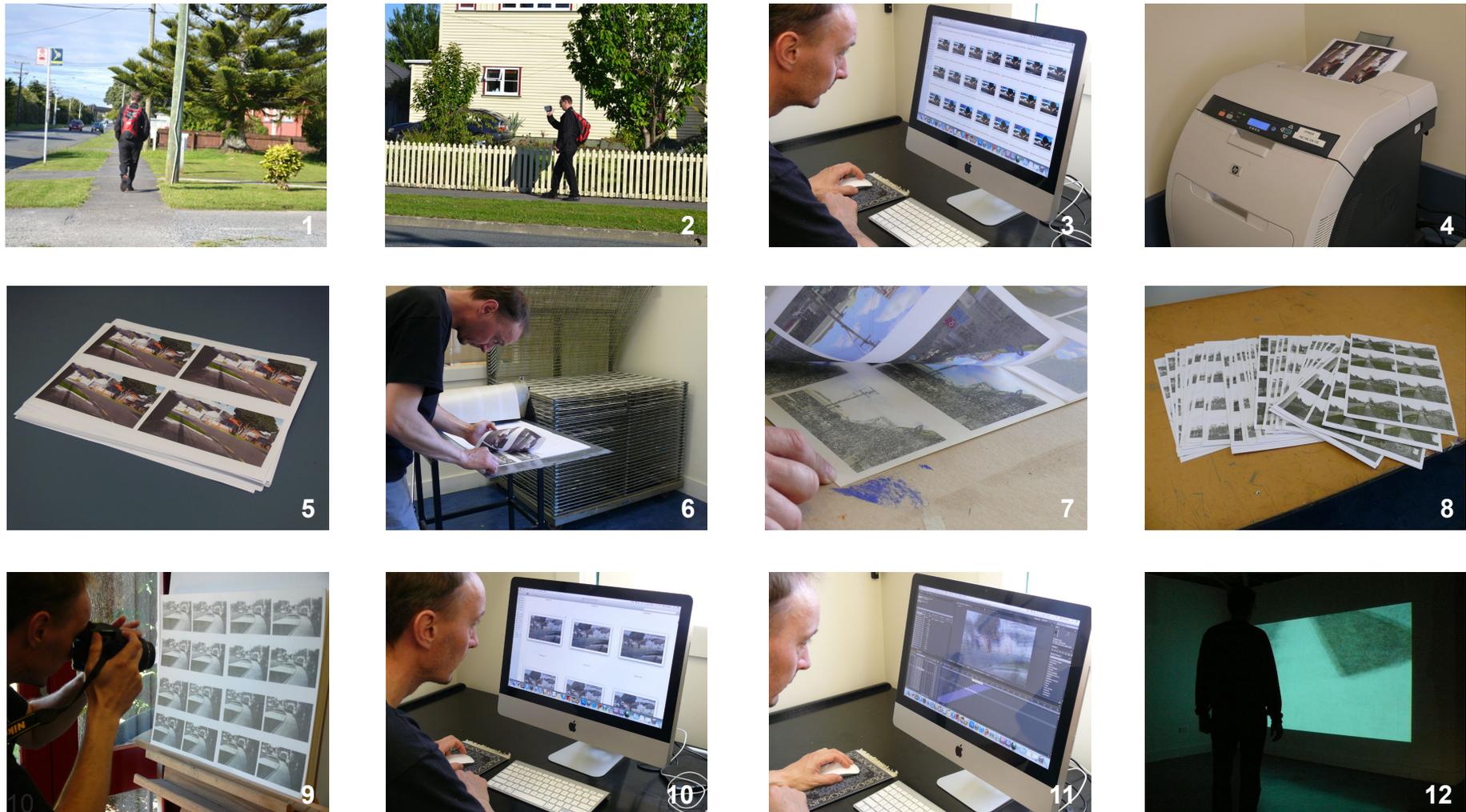


Fig 1. Butts, M. (2012). Images representing different stages of the process developed during the course of this project. See descriptions on the following page. [Digital photographs].

1. I routinely walked to and from work throughout the year. The walk took approximately 30 minutes each way.
2. I filmed while walking approximately 25 times throughout the year. The resulting raw documentary footage varied in length from approximately 10 – 30 minutes.
3. I reviewed the raw footage and captured short clips as a sequence of stills using film-editing software. Each clip was between 10 – 30 seconds, producing sequences of up to 800 stills.
4. The sequences of stills were printed using a laser printer at 8 x 15 cm.
5. An example of a printed sequence of stills.
6. The printed sequences of stills were transferred onto cartridge paper using a photo-release process. This involved placing the printed stills upside down on top of sheets of cartridge paper, rubbing the back of the paper with turpentine and then passing it through a printing press.
7. The turpentine loosened the toner from the printed page so that when peeled away it left a transferred image on the cartridge paper.
8. An example of a transferred sequence of stills.
9. The still transfers were photographed in sequence.
10. The photographed sequence of still transfers were then downloaded to the computer.
11. Digital transfers were returned to filmic form and manipulated using film-editing software and filmic works were produced.
12. Filmic works were projected into a space.

## 3.2 Discussion of key processes and methods

### 3.2.1 Walking as a method of engagement with lived experience

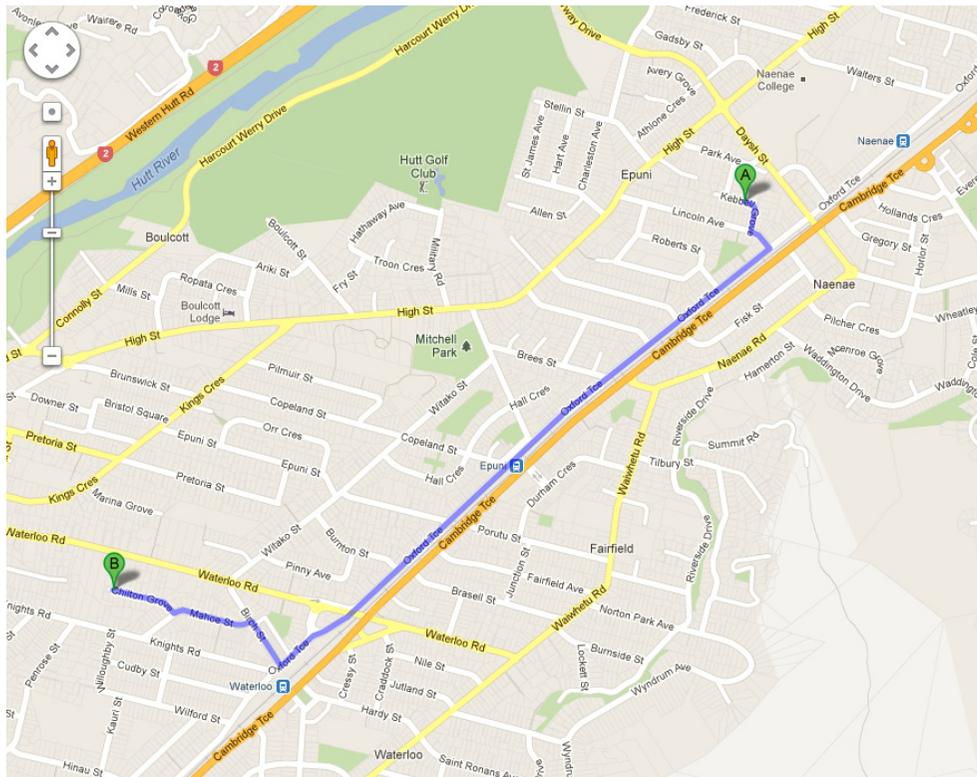


Fig. 2. Butts, M. (2012). Google Maps view of my walk to work [Digital image].

I walked to and from work routinely during 2012, as I had done for the previous 3 years. The walk took approximately 30 minutes each way at a decent pace. The neighbourhood I walked through was typically suburban New Zealand dominated by a blend of 1920s-30s cottages and villas and mid-twentieth century state housing and could aptly be described as a built environment. As is depicted in fig. 2 the walk took me onto and along Oxford Terrace, which runs alongside the urban railway tracks, before veering off again towards my destination.

In habitually walking this route I attempted to immerse myself in the life-world, described by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1948) as 'the world in which we are always already living and which furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance and all scientific determination' (p. 41). Walking in this sense was aimed at attempting to understand my relationship to the world on a phenomenological level through a pathic, sensual engagement. The majority of the journey was spent walking straight ahead in one direction. While this was predetermined as the most direct route, it became accepted as a method of increasing the potential to become susceptible to inattentive states as the conscious activity of navigating turns and corners was reduced. In routinely walking in this manner where bodily memory takes over in a pre-cognitive, temporally heterogenous experience I assumed the phenomenological attitude of observing experiences, but only able to be conscious of that to which my consciousness was directed.

I positioned myself as the transient subject passing through a suburban setting. The environment corresponded to what anthropologist Marc Augé (1994) describes as a 'non-place', somewhere to pass through rather than be in, and as such could be interpreted as only as a backdrop for the in-betweenness of my passage. However, because of the very livedness of the ambulatory process I was at once detached, but also pathically immersed in my surroundings. Walking as a method facilitated an intertwining of self, mind and world and emphasised a bodily as well as ocular engagement. As I repeated the walk over days, weeks and months, the complexity of my embodied perceptions deepened and transformed as I more easily lapsed into an inattentive, embedded modality of being, 'managing space-time by tracing out the same route again and again' (Felski, 1999, p. 28).

### 3.2.2 Filming while walking



Fig. 3. Butts, M. (2012). Photographs of filming while walking to work [Digital photographs taken at different points along Oxford Tce].

I used camera and camcorder to record my experiences digitally, over the course of the year gathering film footage to document my experiences while walking. I trialed a variety of ways of holding and affixing different cameras, including strapping an iPhone to my chest and wearing a makeshift helmet-cam, with the aim of establishing strategies to emphasise the experiential aspects of walking. In fig. 3 I use a hand-held camcorder. This became the preferred method as it allowed flexibility in moving the camera to follow the turns and tilts of my gaze, with the intention of trying to record the flow and complexity of my perceptual experiences. While in fig. 3 the camera seems quite prominent, I developed a more relaxed manner of holding it closer to my shoulder allowing me to forget about it and it became a less obtrusive and more ubiquitous accessory.

Filming while walking was a different experience to just walking. The phenomenological inquiry focused on using the camera as a tool to gain an understanding of the experiential through attempting to mimick the visuality of my gaze. The body became an

essential component of the captured imagery, as the camera inevitably picked up and conveyed the rhythms of motion involved in walking.

Using digital devices meant that experience became mediated by technology. The resulting footage (see DVD, footage 1, 2 and 3) conveyed something of the rhythms of walking, but the jerkiness was unnerving and bore minimal resemblance to the actual, calmer and more tranquil nature of the experience of walking, where the vestibulo-ocular reflex compensates for the juddering caused by each footstep. The camera framed the world around me, forcing consideration of it as images and there was a loss of a sense of the peripheral. Interference caused by wind, shaking or knocking the camera against my clothing, and the passing of cars dominated sound quality. The embodied presence evoked by the technomediated raw footage was erratic and invasive. Although it documented some of the visuality and measured time of my walk, the experiential aspects did not align with the more distracted nature of my lived experience.

### 3.2.3 Selecting and working with stills

Separating short clips of the raw footage into sequences of stills was part of a sense-making process, a picking apart as part of the search to gain more understanding of lived experience. When making decisions for selecting clips from the raw footage a set of criteria emerged based on a potential to convey ideas about lived experience, duration and embodiment. For example, footage that contained passing objects captured a sense of temporality, footage looking straight ahead contained some of the hypnotic

bodily rhythms of walking, while footage where the camera turned left or right, up or down was suggestive of the intentionality of my gaze. Figure 4 gives examples of some of these strategies.



Fig. 4. Butts, M. (2012). Examples of raw footage captured during my walk home along Oxford Terrace. The stills in each sequence are 1 second apart. 1. An example of approaching objects. 2. An example of turning to look left. 3. An example of moving the camera from a downward to an upward position [Digital film stills].

### 3.2.4 Transference



Fig. 5. Butts, M. (2012). Further description of the photo-release process. 1. Rubbing the back of the stills with turps face down onto a sheet of cartridge. 2. Running the stills through the press. 3. Peeling back the stills to reveal the transfers. 4. Sheets of transfers being stored in sequential order on the drying rack [Digital photographs].

Working with selected stills from the raw documentary footage I developed a process of transferring the imagery using a photo-release technique (fig. 5, see also figs. 1.6 – 1.8). Experimentation involved testing the many variables inherent in the photo-release process such as the size of each still, paper quality and texture, the amount and timing of solvent used, pressure, release timing, and unexpected or accidental occurrences. The aim of this process was to move the imagery away from the purely documentary and to place emphasis on the materiality of surface as a form of resingularisation and a means of accessing a more embodied understanding of the experience. In manipulating the many variables I was able to produce imagery that was consistently grainy and textured, although also quite unpredictable, while still retaining some of the indexicality of the

photographic image. The sequence of transferred stills in fig. 6 demonstrates the unexpected occurrences encountered during the photo-release process, and also during the process of re-photographing the transfers. A slight shift in the variables associated with this process produced quite different results, as displayed in the first two images where the toner has released more consistently on the first still than on the second, while movements of the camera during re-photographing exposed some of the edges surrounding the images, as seen in the first, third and last images.



Fig. 6. Butts, M. (2012). Examples of the photo-release technique. A sequence of 4 consecutive still transfers that have been re-photographed [Digital photographs].

The transfer process was time-consuming and facilitated a bodily involvement in the materiality of the footage that acted as metaphor for lived experience and duration, and extended the phenomenological approach of attempting to gain a pathic understanding of my experiences while walking, in a sense re-living the walk through the making process. In transferring each of the stills by hand I set up a process of reiteration, the indexicality of the image passing from one surface to the next. The resulting transference of the imagery passed it through into a more palpable, haptic condition where materiality dominated content, the

grainy and fragmented nature of the image reflective of the incompleteness of conscious experience.

### 3.2.5 Filmic manipulation and layering

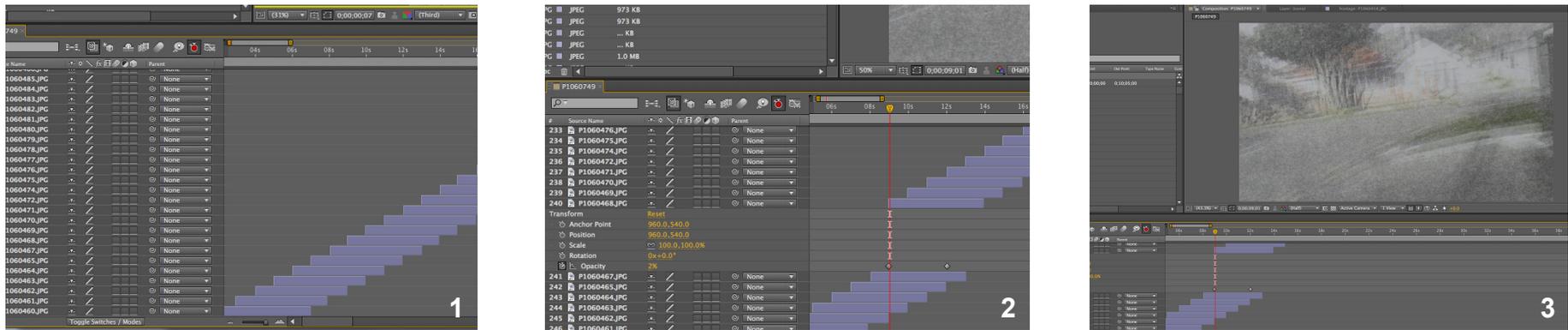


Fig. 7. Butts, M. (2012). Screenshots showing examples of filmic manipulation of the photographed still transfers using Adobe After Effects. 1. Transfers are depicted as blue tiles layered on top of each other in staggered sequential order. 2. An example of applying effects to individual still transfers, in this case adjusting the opacity. 3. An example of 5 still transfers overlapping, each with the opacity adjusted [Digital images].

The intention of this process was to re-situate the photographed transfers in filmic form, to find ways to remove the jerkiness present in the raw footage, and search for filmic strategies that were evocative of the experiential nature of walking. Involvement in the materiality of filmic form and a concern for layering, texture, surface and abstraction were all reflective of my positioning and sensibilities as a painter. Manipulation of the temporal aspects of the film allowed for a distortion of measured time. Slow motion, fast forward, pause, loop and repetition were all taken into consideration, but the temporality particular to the resulting

filmic works emerged out of the sense-making process of piecing back together the individual still transfers in search of a form more reflective of the experiential. Variables included the length, degree of overlap and degree of opacity applied to each still. For example in fig. 7 each still transfer is 5 seconds long and overlapped at 1 second intervals. Opacity is applied so that each still fades in, reaching full opacity after 3 seconds. In this example each transition leaves a trace of the previous moment. The constant re-placement of one still over another in on-going succession can be seen to make reference to a sense of duration while walking as a state of constant change. Seen in this way, layering and transparency as processes act as a metaphor for Merleau-Ponty's concept of the thickness of the lived present. Fig. 8 demonstrates how differing degrees of layering and transparency can achieve a sense of the layering of moments.



Fig. 8. Butts, M. (2012). Examples of layering and transparency produced using film-editing software [Digital film stills].

### 3.2.6 Projection

Projection was explored for its potential to provide an immersive space for the viewer through filmic encounter. The aim was to attempt to convey the experiential states associated with walking through activation of the projection site as a pre-cognitive, inter-subjective space. Through utilising the haptic qualities of the photo-release processes consideration was also given to attempting to immerse the viewer in an affective form of viscosity, where bodily involvement and touch become a part of the work, and the haptic space of the film becomes what film analyst Giuliana Bruno (2002) describes as 'habitable' space (p. 250).

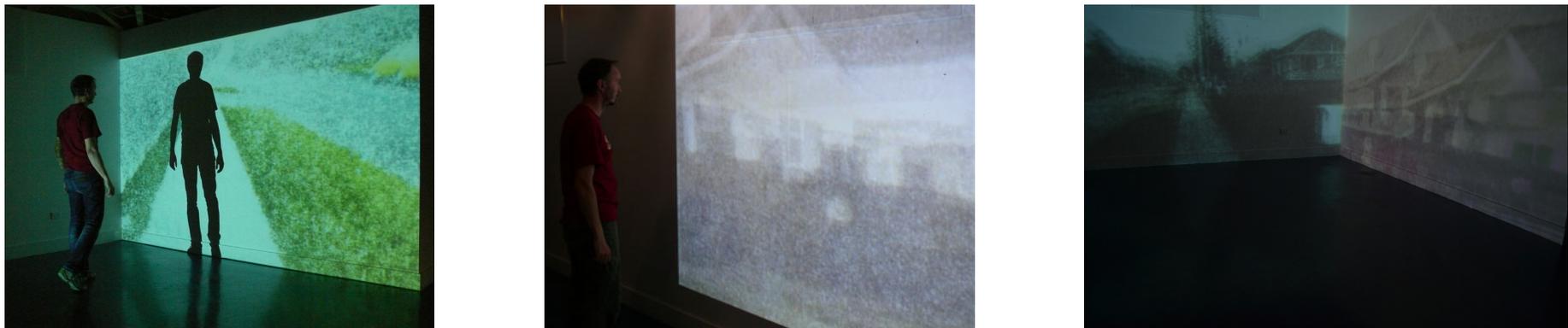


Fig. 9. Butts, M. (2012). Experimenting with positioning the projector on the floor, from the side and using two projectors [Digital film projection].

Experimentation with positioning the projector produced different results (see fig. 9). With the projector on the floor the viewer's shadow interrupted the image. This occurrence had the potential for enhancing the interactive and embodied experience, and triggering associative connections within the viewer. Projecting from above or from the side I was able to get close to the film

without interruption. This closeness enabled more engagement with the materiality of the film and a haptic form of looking. The scale of the projection also affected viewer experience differently. Smaller projections were more intimate, but also more remote as the viewer was positioned as an observer. Larger projections were more encompassing and as the viewer I was made more aware of my own scale and positioning within the bounds of the work. Multiple projections, more fully encompassed the viewer's peripheral vision as well as creating multiple durations.

## Chapter 4 Commentary on the development of the project

This chapter discusses key exploratory works and the decision-making processes that occurred during the development of the project. The intention is to convey an overall sense of the project unfolding and the works are selected with this end in mind.

Works bearing the title *There* with an accompanying date are based on documentary footage recorded walking to work on that day. Similarly, works bearing the title *Back* are based on documentary footage recorded walking home.



Fig. 10. Butts, M. (2012). Paint studies based on film stills taken at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Oxford Terrace [Acrylic on paper, 400x600cm].

The works in fig. 10 were part of a series of experiments focused on attempting to convey ideas about my experiences while walking through the materiality of paint. The limited palette and simplification of form were intended to generalise the imagery as reflective of the filtering processes of conscious activity. As representations of my experiences they did not contain the sense of duration I had associated with my lived experiences, and the decision was made to shift the project away from painting to focus instead on filmic form. However, the paintings highlighted a desire to become involved in the materiality of surface as metaphor for the experiential. Acknowledging the background I had in painting allowed me to reframe my research question more specifically as ‘how can I, as a painter, convey some of the experiential states related to my walks to and from work, using the medium of film?’



Fig. 11. Butts, M. (2012). Example of layering techniques used in *Four walks*. In each successive image an additional layer of footage captured at the corner of Lincoln Ave has been added. [Screenshots taken during the editing process].

For the work depicted in fig. 11 (see DVD, footage 4) I filmed the same part of my walk to work on four consecutive days, then layered the four pieces of raw footage, experimenting with differing degrees of transparency in order to make the four pieces of footage simultaneously visible. The intention was to explore the routine, habitual nature of my lived experience, drawing upon Felski's description of the all-to-familiar 'lulling us into a trance-like forgetfulness; unable to experience the vivid, clamoring there-ness of the world' (2002, p. 608). I also looked for strategies associated with a sense of temporal dislocation. The footage was slowed down to half speed, which I discovered has the capacity to lull the viewer into a more meditative state. The layering, where fragments of landscape almost, but don't quite fit together created a sense of temporal disruption. While the slowness was effective in evoking a trance-like state, the busyness of the imagery did not achieve a sense of inattentiveness. Although it had been slowed down along with the footage, the sound was still imposing and tended to dominate the imagery.



Fig. 12. Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from *There*, 26 April 2012 [Digital film stills]. Footage captured mid-way along Oxford Tce.

The raw footage for the work in fig. 12 (see DVD, footage 5) was filmed in mid-autumn. I had set the camera lens to zoom and panned left and right, up and down while recording, attempting to mimic the habit of looking around at different objects. A section of footage was digitally separated into film stills. I then re-selected every tenth still and reconstructed the film using editing software. The stills were overlapped with transparent transitions that then held a degree of opacity before fading into the next still. The aim of this work was to explore the potential for temporal disruption within a single piece of footage. The intention in selecting only some of the stills was to fragment, or disrupt the temporal flow of the raw footage and enable the work to operate outside of measured time in search of evoking a more embodied, lived sense of duration.

In only capturing fragments of the world around me the footage carried a sense of the incompleteness of conscious experience. The process of layering stills where the trace of the previous moment is retained was suggestive of the durational qualities of walking. I also became aware of the affective potential within the material, where colour and tempo can create different sensations. In searching for processes that made sense of the visual aspects of my experiences, sound was inadvertently

removed from this work. In watching the film, the absence of sound drew attention to my own corporeal presence as the viewer, as discrete from that of the person filming. While I could see potential in sound editing, the decision was made at this point to limit my investigation to the visual aspects of my experiences to explore this idea further.

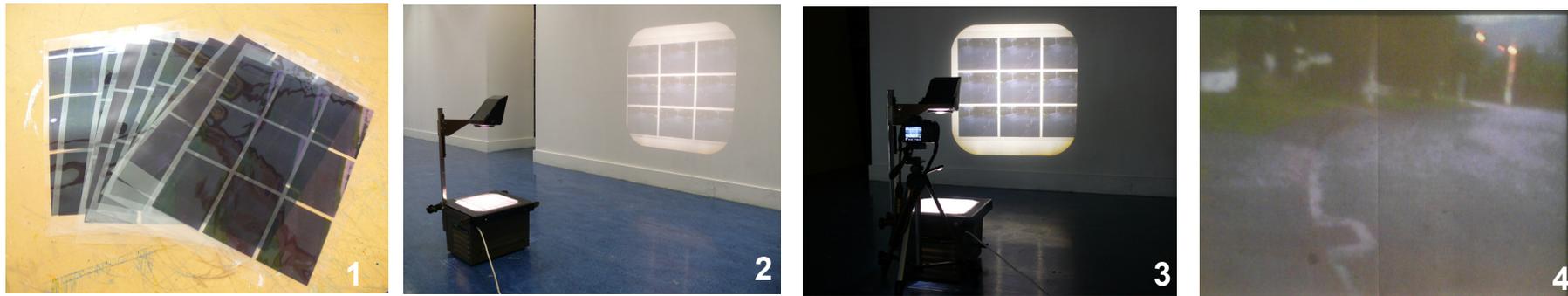


Fig. 13. Butts, M. (2012). Images demonstrating the process used for *There, 13 March*. 1. Stills printed onto OHP transparency. 2. Stills projected onto a wall, 3. Camera positioned behind the ohp to re-photograph each still. 4. A resulting image [Digital photographs]. Footage captured in Lincoln Ave.

The work in fig. 13 (see DVD, footage 6) represents early attempts to re-interpret the raw footage through working with printed film stills. I experimented with techniques to manipulate the stills, in this case printing them onto OHP transparency, re-photographing the projected images and then returning them to filmic state. The resulting film in this case was a quieter work due to the slow pace, sparse composition and dimness of the early morning light, and the imagery reveals itself gradually through the materiality of the filmic surface. The desire to dismantle the footage, work with it, and reassemble it allowed me to re-experience the walk in a kind of sense-making activity, complicating the temporal nature of the work as the lived time of my making layered onto the duration of the actual walk. This work prompted an interest in emphasising the materiality of film as a means of evoking

a more affective response.

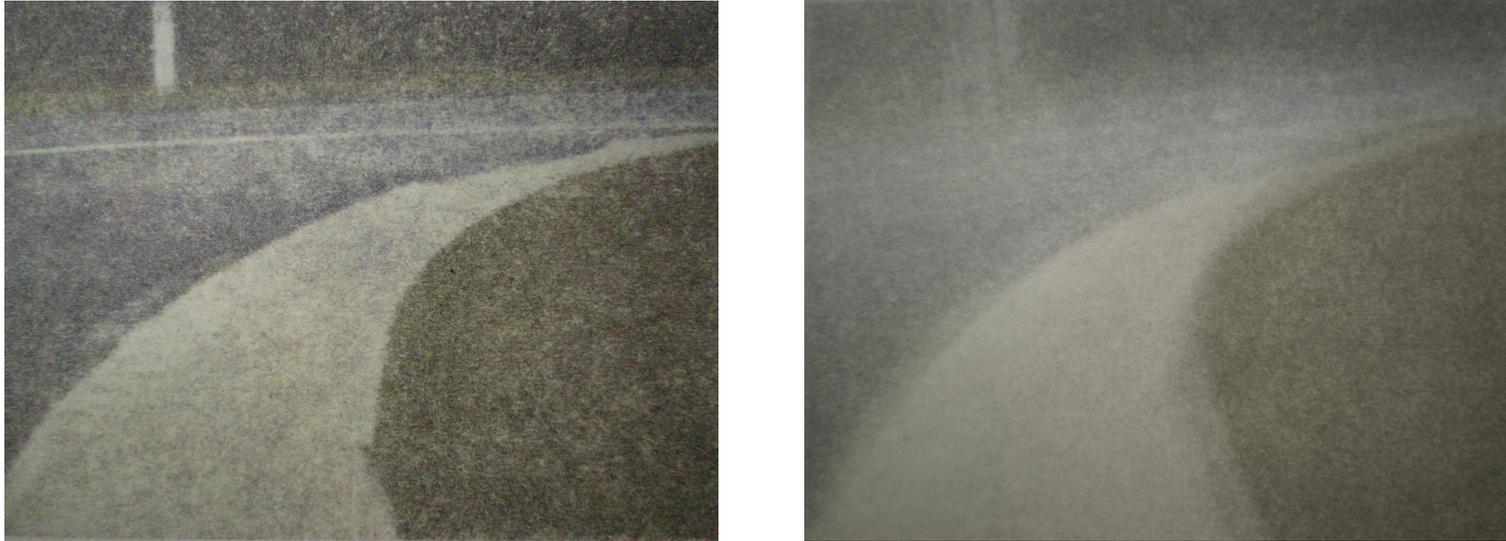


Fig. 14. Butts, M. (2012). A comparison between a photographed still transfer on the left, and a still from *There*, 29 March on the right [Digital photograph & film still]. Footage captured at the corner of Lincoln Ave and Oxford Tce.

For the work depicted in fig. 14 (see DVD, footage 7) I returned to a photo-release technique I had briefly experimented with in the post-graduate diploma year (as outlined on page 26). I selected raw footage of a simple composition, looking down at the curve of the footpath, in order to focus on the materiality of surface. As is evidenced in fig. 14, I discovered the graininess achieved through the photo-release process was evocative of a haptic form of seeing while still retaining the indexicality of the photographic image as a remnant of the original experience. Layered in filmic form the transfers dissolved into one another, embodying a sense of duration. On viewing the transfers and the film I was conscious of a desire to fill in the gaps left by the



Fig. 15. Butts, M. (2012). Test projection of *There, 29 March* [Digital photograph].

process and mentally, perhaps pre-cognitively, complete the image. This provided a deterritorialising function, repositioning the imperceptible as the perceived through the inter-subjective transference of affects, and acting as a metaphor for the reconfiguration of lived experience. Projecting the image activated the space between lens and wall, a space that I could physically occupy as viewer. I also became interested in how the ambulatory rhythms of walking evoked by this film produced a hypnotic, somatic effect.

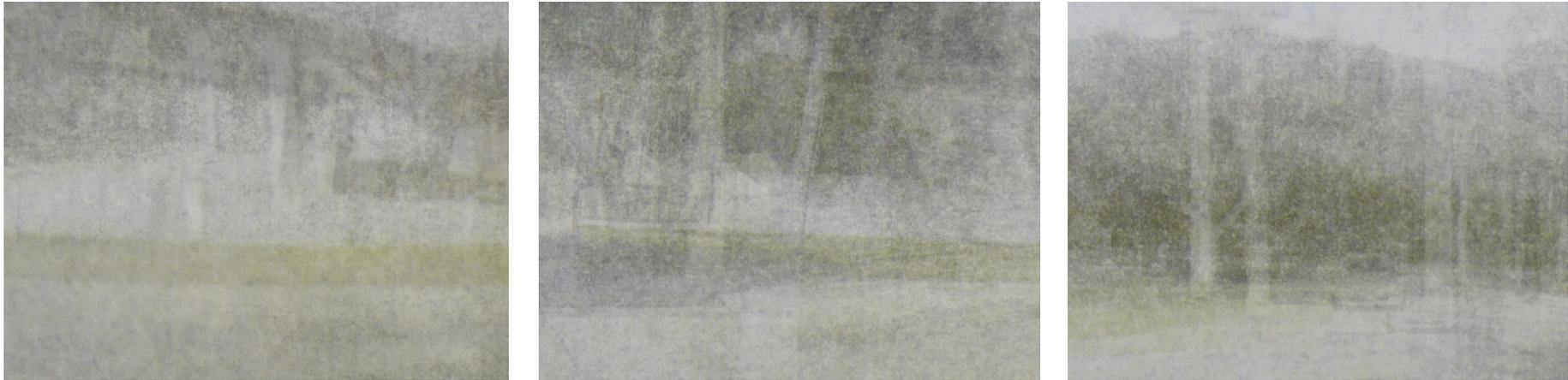


Fig. 16. Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from *There, 26 April 2012* [Digital film stills]. Footage captured in Lincoln Ave.

The work in fig. 16 (see DVD, footage 8) represents a stage in the project where I focussed on manipulating film with the sensibility of a painter. This work extended experimentation with the haptic qualities of film, stretching the indexicality of the image to the limits through a strong emphasis on surface texture, layering, transparency and abstraction as material concerns. The resulting film is a slowly shifting field of grainy texture, where barely distinguishable images dissolve into each other in a constant unfolding. While this work operated successfully on a haptic level, urging the viewer to co-construct the imagery, a sense of duration within the work was lacking and the visual evidence of the original walks were largely too obscure to identify.



Fig. 17. Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from *Back, 10 May 2012* depicting a passing letterbox. [Digital film stills]. Footage captured along Oxford Tce.



Fig. 18. Butts, M. (2012). Projection view of *Back, 10 May 2012* [Digital photograph].

The work in figure. 17 (see DVD, footage 9) was one of several experiments in which I isolated short clips of footage that signified a sense of the temporal, through rhythmic forward movement, turns of the head, or the approaching and passing of objects. The resulting film attempted to disrupt these measured time indicators though the use of slow motion and transparent layering. By balancing the graininess of the process with identifiable imagery the work also successfully shifts the viewer's eye back and forth from surface to content in a haptic form of looking.



Fig. 19. Butts, M. (2012). Outdoor projection of *Back*, 10 May 2012 [Digital photograph].

scale of the human figure was more conducive to an embodied response. For technical reasons I was limited in being able to find suitable sites to project outdoors and the decision was made to focus on indoor projection.

At this stage I regularly projected filmic experiments, looking to establish a gallery space 'to which you take your whole body' (Hawkins, 2010, p. 324), providing an immersive sensory experience, and attempting to collapse the subject/object binary. In fig. 18 the work is projected onto a full wall, which I discovered embedded the work in the materiality of the substrate. I also trialed projecting in outdoor settings, attempting to continue the re-constructive loop and returning the imagery to its point of origin, the scale of the work more or less matching the actual (fig. 19). The large size of the projections were dominating and as viewer I felt insignificant, rather than immersed and I deduced that scale more closely aligned with the

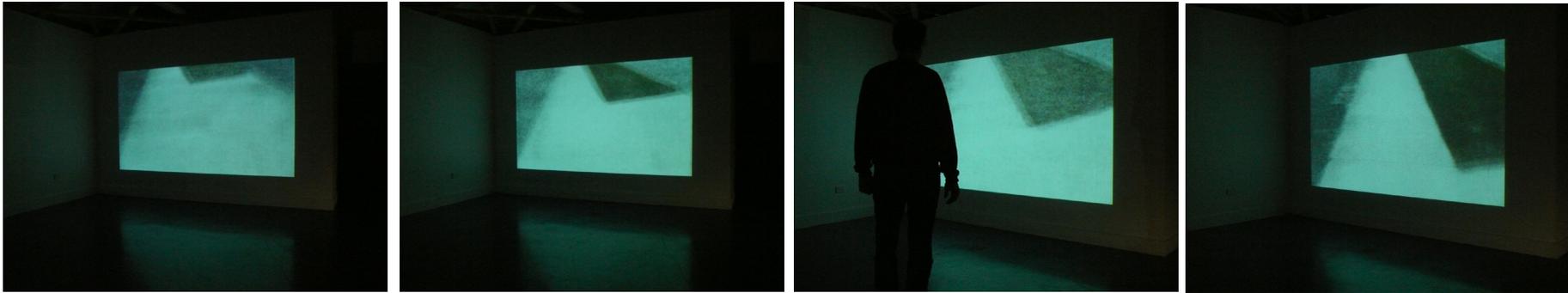


Fig. 20. Butts, M. (2012). Projection view of *There*, 29 August 2012 [Digital photographs]. Footage captured along Oxford Tce.

In selecting footage for the work in fig. 20 (see DVD, footage 10) I looked for a mundane moment that contained its own ambulatory rhythms and also a degree of abstraction that would allow the viewer to contribute to the reconstruction of the experience. The movement of the camera looking first downward, then upward mimicked the lifting of my head while walking. On reviewing the film I realised there were felt associations with the downward and darkened beginning of the film evoking a submerged, internalised experience, and the upward movement towards white at the end of the film evoking a sense of emergence. I decided to explore these associations further in subsequent works. Projection of this work was trialled in a more conventional cinematic format to test the immersive potential of that form. Although I could not 'enter' the image, as it did not reach the ground, the size of the projection being relative to the size of my body facilitated a corporeal engagement. Inter-subjective experience was enhanced by the disorientating effects of the darkened space, as I became conscious of perceiving myself perceiving, and also of my own presence as absence in assuming the role of the walker in the film.

As I continued to accumulate a resource of manipulated clips the sense making process shifted towards a deeper consideration of filmic techniques in order to build on previous ideas. The work in fig. 21 (see DVD, footage 11) is one of a group of experiments in which I cut and spliced sequences of footage together and applied cross-dissolves and fades, aiming to draw associations between discrete moments of my walk. The intention was to create a greater sense of duration through a more complex unfolding of experience, providing a more substantial opportunity for a co-creative encounter. I was encouraged by the ability of these works to convey a sense of lapsing in and out of attentive states and the subsequent fragmentation of measured time. The editing processes established the potential for construction of narrative, which I attempted to keep to a minimum to avoid reflective interpretation of the work.



Fig. 21. Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from *Back, 7 November 2012* depicting fade to white, fade to black and cross-dissolve [Digital film stills]. Footage captured along Oxford Tce.

## Chapter 5 Thesis Exhibition

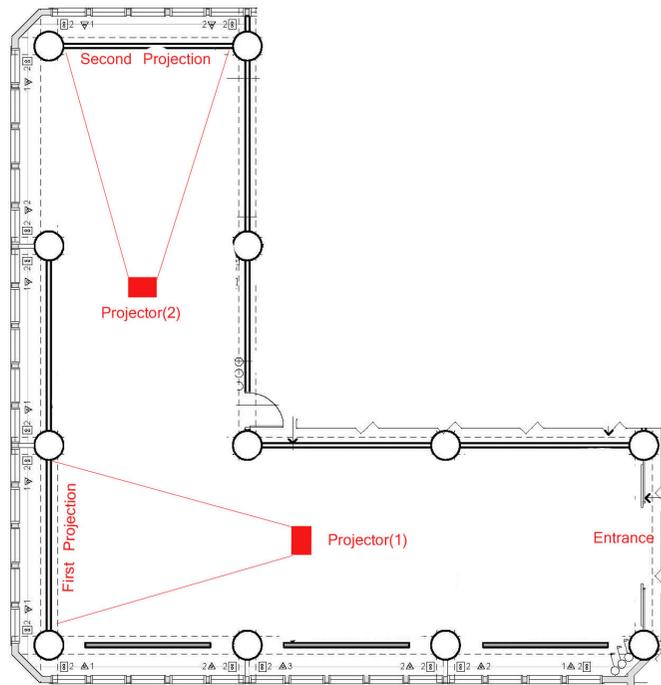


Fig. 22. Butts, M. (2012). Floor plan of the gallery indicating positioning and direction of the two projections.

The thesis exhibition occurred at Toi Poneke Gallery in Wellington, 8 – 28 February 2013, and consisted of two filmic works projected onto end walls of the gallery (see figs. 22 and 23). The works were intended to operate in tandem to activate the entire gallery space as an ambulatory setting for the viewer. Both projections fitted exactly the dimensions of the wall, with the intention of adjoining the space of the projected image with the actual space of the room in order to involve the viewer as a participant in the work. Both works were set on a loop with a brief pause, as it was acknowledged that the viewer would enter the space at any point in time and therefore encounter the work always already in motion.

The first projection (see DVD, footage 12) positioned on the facing wall as you entered the gallery was a six minute filmic work based on raw footage recorded during my walk home. The footage was selected because it contained a sequence of upward, downward, left and right pans, some passing and approaching objects and a clear sense of forward momentum. The intention was to draw the viewer into the space, and at the same time into a state of filmic encounter, where their approach to the work through the space of the gallery intermingled with the virtual walk projected into the space. For

this work I abandoned experimentation with the filmic techniques of fades and cross-dissolves mentioned on page 43, deciding instead to construct the work using the transfer processes I had established in earlier studio practice. My feeling was that the additive nature of fades and cross-dissolves gave them a reflective, rather than pre-reflective purpose that negated the intention of the work. The resulting imagery facilitated an immersive engagement for the viewer from the point of entry into the space, emphasising the livedness of being through drawing attention to the pre-linguistic and embodied nature of experience.

After approaching the first work, the second projection (see DVD, footage 13) could be seen on the far wall around the corner, depicting the view across a street. For this work only thirteen still transfers were used. These were layered in a cumulative and looped sequence that lasted one minute. This work intentionally gives a limited sense of forward momentum, attempting to convey the pre-cognitive experience of momentarily becoming static while walking. Again, the physical actions of the viewer in reaching the turn of the room and stopping to view the second work were intended to act as a point of entry into the virtual occurrences within the filmic. By holding the viewer in a static immersive state the work attempted to draw attention to that state through a physical, bodily unfolding.

Both works encouraged engagement through haptic looking. The visible pixilation of the projected film was intentionally used to act as a reminder of the filmic surface, bringing the viewer back to the tangible and building a tension between the actual and the virtual. The placement of the filmic projections precisely within the dimensions of each wall embedded them into the architecture. This, along with the need to physically walk through the gallery space in order to view the works, connected the projected works with the materiality of the gallery space. In order to experience the work the viewer was also required to experience their own

interaction with the work in situ as a bodily, pre-cognitive engagement.



Fig. 23. Butts, M. (2012). Views of first projection: *Back*, 30 June 2012 (images 1-3), and second projection: *Back*, 24 August 2012 (image 4), [Digital photographs]. Footage captured along Oxford Tce.

# Conclusion

This research project set out to use filmic encounter to draw attention to the experiential aspects of walking as a means of exploring the larger concept of lived experience. By habitually walking to and from work and observing a potential lapse into inattentive states where somatic bodily memory took over my activities, I was able to associate the pre-reflective nature of lived experience with theory on everyday life and distraction as a coping mechanism.

Adopting a pathic approach to working with the materiality of documentary footage I had captured while walking, through dismantling, manipulating and then piecing back together the footage as a kind of sense-making process enabled access to a pre-cognitive understanding reflective of the momentum of lived experience. As a painter working with film I identified the painterly qualities of texture, layering, transparency and abstraction as haptic concerns, and was able to activate those through temporal processes particular to film in search of evoking a sense of the duration of lived experience.

Affective transference, or resingularisation, occurred in a reiterative fashion throughout the processes I developed: through the unfolding encounters experienced while walking, through the processual transference of imagery while deconstructing and reconstructing filmic footage, and through the potentially creative collision between the artwork and viewer. All were moments of production, which held within them the potential for an inter-subjective unfolding. In attempting to evoke rather than represent a sense of lived experience through filmic form, affective encounter became a strategy to create a rupture to the everyday, injecting a sense of strangeness into the familiar, jolting the viewer out of preconceived perceptions to facilitate an awareness of the

extraordinary within the ordinary, and to draw attention to some of the distracted and embodied states experienced while walking.

In exploring the underpinning proposition, the notion that lived experience is always already happening, this research project did not seek a linguistically driven response. In attempting to bypass intellect in favour of a pre-cognitive, bodily knowledge the project may be seen not as an attempt to make sense of the world, but as exploring the possibilities of experiencing being in the world.

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## Table of Images

Fig. 1 Butts, M. (2012). Images representing different stages of the process developed during the course of this project [Digital photographs].

Fig. 2 Butts, M. (2012). Google Maps view of my walk to work [Digital image].

Fig. 3 Butts, M. (2012). Photographs of filming while walking to work [Digital photographs taken at different points along Oxford Tce].

Fig. 4 Butts, M. (2012). Examples of raw footage captured during my walk home along Oxford Terrace [Digital film stills].

Fig. 5 Butts, M. (2012). Further description of the photo-release process [Digital photographs].

Fig. 6 Butts, M. (2012). Examples of the photo-release technique, a sequence of 4 consecutive still transfers that have been re-photographed [Digital photographs].

Fig. 7 Butts, M. (2012). Screenshots showing examples of filmic manipulation of the photographed still transfers using Adobe After Effects [Digital images].

Fig. 8 Butts, M. (2012). Examples of layering and transparency produced using film-editing software [Digital film stills].

Fig. 9 Butts, M. (2012). Experimenting with positioning the projector on the floor, from the side and using two projectors [Digital film projection].

Fig. 10 Butts, M. (2012). Paint studies based on film stills taken at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Oxford Terrace [Acrylic on paper, 400x600cm].

Fig. 11 Butts, M. (2012). Example of layering techniques used in Four walks. In each successive image an additional layer of

footage captured at the corner of Lincoln Avenue has been added. [Screenshots taken during the editing process].

Fig. 12 Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from There, 26 April 2012 [Digital film stills].

Fig. 13 Butts, M. (2012). Images demonstrating the process used for There, 13 March [Digital photographs].

Fig. 14 Butts, M. (2012). A comparison between a photographed still transfer on the left, and a still from There, 29 March on the right [Digital photograph & film still].

Fig. 15 Butts, M. (2012). Test projection of There, 29 March [Digital photograph].

Fig. 16 Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from There, 26 April 2012 [Digital film stills].

Fig. 17 Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from Back, 10 May 2012 depicting a passing letterbox. [Digital film stills].

Fig. 18 Butts, M. (2012). Projection view of Back, 10 May 2012 [Digital photograph].

Fig. 19 Butts, M. (2012). Outdoor projection of Back, 10 May 2012 [Digital photograph].

Fig. 20 Butts, M. (2012). Projection view of There, 29 August 2012 [Digital photographs].

Fig. 21 Butts, M. (2012). Film stills from Back, 7 November 2012 depicting fade to white, fade to black and cross-dissolve [Digital film stills].

Fig. 22 Butts, M. (2012). Floor plan of the gallery indicating positioning and direction of the two projections [Digital image].

Fig. 23 Butts, M. (2012). Views of first projection: Back, 30 June 2012 (images 1-3), and second projection: Back, 24 August 2012 (image 4), [Digital photographs]. Footage captured along Oxford Tce.

## Table of filmic works on the accompanying DVD

Footage 1 Butts, M. (2012). Raw footage captured at the corner of Lincoln Ave on 23 April [Digital film, 1:18 secs].

Footage 2 Butts, M. (2012). Raw footage captured walking home along Oxford Tce on 30 June [Digital film, 0:25 secs].

Footage 3 Butts, M. (2012). Raw footage captured walking to work along Oxford Tce on 29 August [Digital film, 0:41 secs].

Footage 4 Butts, M. (2012). Four walks [Digital film, 4:26 secs].

Footage 5 Butts, M. (2012). There, 26 April 2012 [Digital film, 3:31 secs].

Footage 6 Butts, M. (2012). There, 13 March 2012 [Digital film, 3:01 secs].

Footage 7 Butts, M. (2012). There, 29 March 2012 [Digital film, 1:49 secs].

Footage 8 Butts, M. (2012). There, 26 April 2012 [Digital film, 0:47 secs].

Footage 9 Butts, M. (2012). Back, 10 May 2012 [Digital film, 1:33 secs].

Footage 10 Butts, M. (2012). There, 29 August 2012 [Digital film, 2:06 secs].

Footage 11 Butts, M. (2012). Back, 7 November 2012 [Digital film, 4:19 secs].

Footage 12 Butts, M. (2012). Back, 30 June 2012 [Digital film, 6:32 secs].

Footage 13 Butts, M. (2012). Back, 24 August 2012 [Digital film, 1:13 secs].