

THE RETURN OF THE POLYNESIAN PHANTOM

Nooroa Tapuni 2009

This exegesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the Masters of Art and Design

CONTENTS

Attestation Of Authorship
Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction

Preface: darkness

Chapter 1: *monkey man*
self portrait

Chapter 2: *file corrupted*
rupture
threshold

Chapter 3: *working model*
phantom image
conditioning the phantom state
internalising fabrication
rendering phantom: *working model*
final installation

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendix One: Image Archive of final installation

“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.”

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I would like to thank my supervisor Andrew Douglas for his generosity in sharing knowledge and the meticulous analyses of my ideas and written language.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my partner Sue for all her support and mum and Donald for being mum and Donald.

ABSTRACT

This research project, *Return of the Polynesian Phantom*, investigates self-portraiture through the mediums of moving image, digital modelling, object making, and installation. It seeks to consider in these media an ambiguous threshold between lightness and darkness, the real and the fabricated. The proposition that it explores is that it is at such ambiguous thresholds that notions of identity are negotiated, and where the perception and interpretation of symbolic meaning renders identity phantom.

This thesis is constituted of 80% practiced based and 20% exegesis; this is an examination copy and the extra material will be found in the bound library copy is post-exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

I AM A MAKER

I am not god, though I maybe a monster, a monster descended from monsters.

That is what you would have me believe.

I come from a people who lived in the darkness of caves – underground systems that were used to elude enemies in times of war, and which effected a paradoxical space of submission and strength. My ancestors viewed the world according to the power of the shadow and darkness maintained by complex cavity systems capable of rendering them phantom-like and invisible. I am interested in the paradoxical nature of darkness and the dual purpose that it holds. Creating darkness in a space is a way of opening an internal aspect of myself into the space for the work to take life.

This exegesis sets out to demonstrate an analysis of my practice led research, which in this instance is focused on self-portraiture through moving image, installation and object making. It articulates the theoretical and cultural frameworks underpinning my research practice as well as discusses my methodological approach. For reasons that will become clear in what follows it develops processes particularly open to intuition, mishap and rupture.

The preface of the exegesis opens a discussion of the different perceptions of darkness in relation to ways of being and a Pacific sense of time – that is the time of the ancestors, the time of colonisation, and what can be considered contemporary or postcolonial time. This research project emerges as part of a series of works undertaken over the last six years that has thematised dark space and which has explored ways of approaching and perceiving work that is coaxial with this darkness. This research project in particular has involved the production of a large body of work, though there are three key works that I focus on to unpack the conceptual premise of the project. These are, “monkey man”, “file corrupted” and “working model”, and a detailed consideration of each will form the basis of the following three chapters.

The exegesis also includes an examination of my practice methodology as it relates to intuition, mishap and rupture. It discusses moments of discovery and disruption that have occurred along the way that were unexpected but ultimately the productive force driving my research project. The glitches that have occurred have significantly disrupted my desire to complete the installation work as originally planned. Rather than discarding the deformed objects and digital files and starting again, I have instead identified the deformity as the more potent and dynamic aspect of the work and developed the work in a way that retains a sense of the incomplete and the deformed.

The exegesis concludes with a discussion of the final installation work that includes elements from “monkey man”, “file corrupted” and “working model”. In the final chapter I will discuss the strategies for creating the final work and key spatial and temporal factors structuring the installation/exhibition experience.

There are several voices in the exegesis and these are differentiated graphically. The first voice is the work documented through image, the second voice is my poetic that connects my practice with the underlying theoretical investigation, and the third voice is the more formal contextualising of my research. To me, each voice is significant and although at times may contradict and complicate the other voices, it is my intention that the resulting tensions create a dynamic reading of my creative practice for the reader.

PREFACE

DARKNESS

Darkness is something we all know; it is the condition of things when the lights are switched off, but in a way it is also an internal view of ourselves.

Anish Kapoor in conversation with Nicholas
Baume

The day the idols were removed, the house in which they had been kept was set on fire; the maraes all over the island were desecrated, the little houses in which the deity was supposed to be invisibly present were burnt; the great stone idol of Rongo at the sea-side, where human sacrifices were offered, was smashed to atoms, and (what is much to be regretted) the magnificent native mahogany (tamanu) trees were set on fire, on account with their supposed connection to idolatry.

Rev. William Wyatt Gill, LL.D

Vilsoni Hereniko explores the notion of 'Pacific time' through the Rotuman Island phases of: *ao maksul ta* (time of darkness), *ao taf ta* (time of light), and *ao fo'ou ta* (new time) which corresponds to other Pacific perspectives of time. This time-line highlights the importance, in Pacific perspective, placed on Christianity as shaping the Pacific identity. *Ao maksul ta* is a circular view of life where there is "no beginning and no end, and each living thing is part of that circle". Located at the "centre of the circle are the

gods of the ancestors”, who stabilise the “unity of the circle from within, as well as attract attention from the periphery”(1994, p.408).

Hereniko also discusses how from the Western perspective of linear, progress time, *Ao maksul ta*, might be considered as merely a form of ‘pagan’ time where darkness prevails and things are “relatively static and simple” (Hereniko, 1994, p. 408). Contrary to this he suggests “*ao maksul ta*” is in fact something that must be viewed as being “dynamic and imaginative” (Hereniko, 1994, p.409).

Darkness in Polynesian conception was fluid and ambiguous: Hine Nui Te Po (literally the Lady of darkness) was originally the Lady of light, an embodiment of double identities, with a vagina that is the site of birth and the locus of death. (Hereniko, 1994, pp. 408-409)

Consistent with the distinction Hereniko develops I am interested in the paradoxical nature of darkness and the dual qualities that it holds. In relation to my own work I firstly install darkness into a space – that is I insert a quantum of dark space into an otherwise illuminated larger space. The aim is to destabilise the site and the normal conditions for viewing an artwork, but also to think of, and to mobilise, darkness as a material in its own right. Creating darkness in a space is also a way of opening a reserved or sheltered zone for deploying an internal aspect of myself so that the work can better take on a specific life of its own.

The missionaries associated the beliefs and customs of indigenous peoples with darkness and “therefore saw [these] as needing to be dispelled by the Light [of] Jesus Christ and his teachings [hence] a cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness [was imagined to have] ensued” (Hereniko, 1994, p. 410). Ultimately, during the time of *ao taf ta*, these associations with lightness and darkness were internalised by Pacific people and constitute a key facet of colonisation.

To the extent that I come from a people who lived in the darkness of caves - underground systems that were used to elude enemies in time of war, and which effected a paradoxical space of submission and strength - my ancestors can be seen to have maintained a different relationship to darkness than that imagined by missionaries and exercised through the colonial agenda, an agenda whose long pedigree can be traced to Plato and his parable of the cave (1992, Part 7, section 7). Contrary to what Plato thought of as an enchained populace forced to watch a shadow play produced by artificial light as if it were reality itself, my ancestors viewed the world according to the power of the shadow and darkness maintained by complex cavity systems capable of rendering them phantom-like and

invisible.

Certainly, at a specific historical threshold my people were met with what French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have described as the white wall, black hole system of colonial privilege and violence:

If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence-types, are racial: yellow man, black man, men in the second or third category. They are also inscribed on the wall, distributed by the hole. They must be Christianized, in other words, facialized. European racism as the white man's claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as "Other." Racism operates by determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometime tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, ... From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be. The dividing line is not between inside and outside but rather is internal to simultaneous signifying chains and successive subjective choices. (2004, p. 197)

In such a system the dark face must be brought forward into an identifying light, the light of a singular internalised Christian identity, Christ, your average 'White Man'. The white face/black hole system can be thought to have literally given face to the 'heathen' rendering it halfway between an image of animal savagery, and a civilised landscape readied for a Christian beatitude and spiritual control.

White gods were taken in exchange for our idols, our invisible housed gods. Our beliefs and ways of being became detached from our body and where housed on the white wall, white face of a white god. This white god, with his white mask bearers who dwell in most savage of our old social construct to be TEMPORAL LORD, to reign with all power, has ruptured and rendered our past heathen and savagery, phantom.

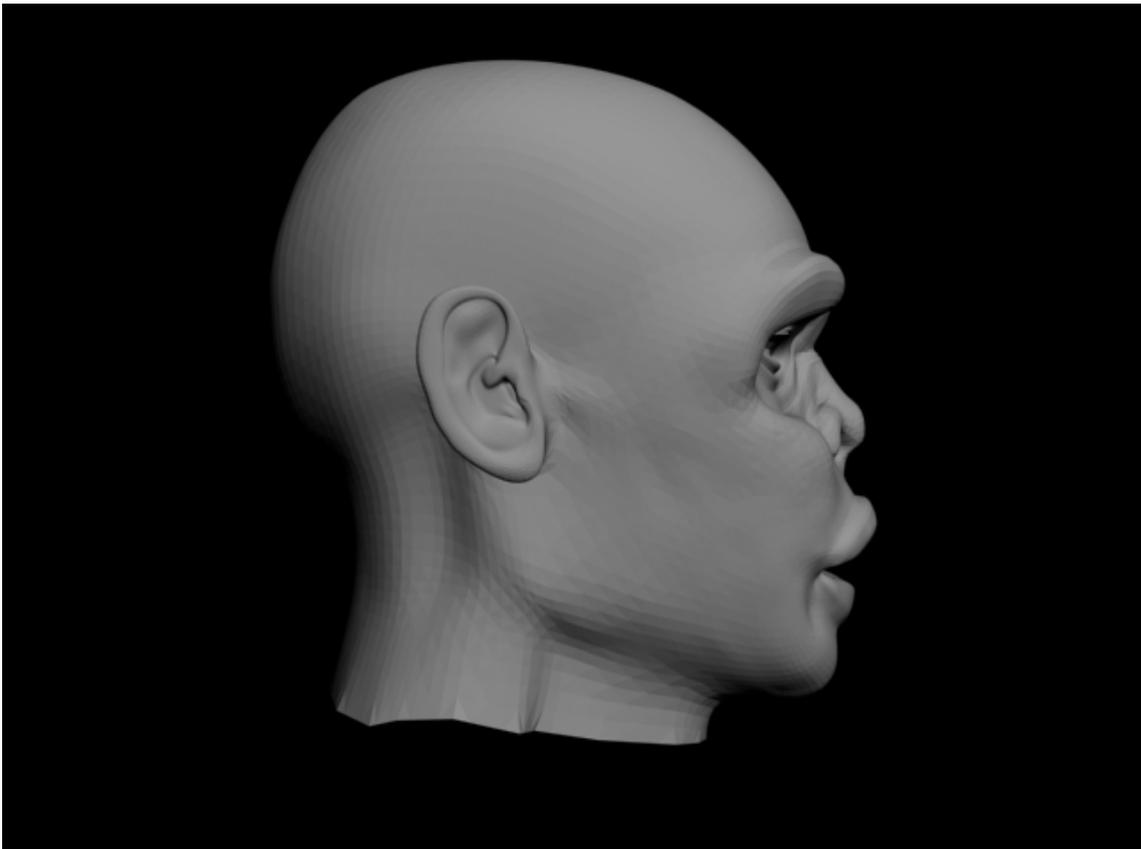
We now dwell in the darkness of the rupture from ancestor as we stand in its penetrative white lightness. Inverted is the Christian notion of Pagan and darkness.

As my methodology of making persist, philosophical and conceptual concerns stem from the work. That is to say that out of the internal aspect of

myself which is opened through making, an unknown, invisible, darkness, is connected to. This darkness is the site in which ideas for this project have come from. This darkness is a site for the presencing of ancestor. The rupture from our concept of darkness through internalising the paradigms of colonization has severed us from our ancestors. This leaves us without ground, suspended.

CHAPTER ONE: MONKEY MAN

SELF-PORTRAIT



monkey man rendered digital file

3D model
2008

And perhaps even the most luminous sphere of our relations with the divine depends, in some way, on the darker one which separates us from animal.

Giorgio Agamben in *The Open: Man and Animal* (2004).

... the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent on the body, even if it is the point of the body culmination. It is not that the head lacks spirit; but it is a spirit in bodily form, a corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit. It is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog-spirit, a bat-spirit...Bacon thus pursues a very peculiar project as a portrait painter: to dismantle the face, to rediscover the head or make it emerge from beneath the face.

Deleuze in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2003).



Self Portrait 1

Joan Miro
Oct 1937-Mar 1938
Pencil, crayon and oil
on canvas
146 x 97 cm

In this chapter I will discuss issues pertaining to self-portraiture and the relation of animal to human by way of the work “Monkey Man” and explore the role of mishap in my methodological process. Art historian David Lomas in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* explores the site of the face as a ‘transaction between self and other’ (1997, p. 169). In his critique of Miro’s “Self-Portrait 1”, where Miro utilized a concave mirror through which he drew a monstrously distorted portrait of himself to reflect what he thought was the troubled epoch he lived in, Lomas claims that this self portrait is a record of that putative moment of rupture and estrangement [when a...] self-portrait [becomes...] a portrait of the self as other’ (1997, p. 170).

The self-portrait incorporates an actualizing of self, an experience that can be uncanny and as Lomas discusses self as other. By comparison the notion of self that I explore in this body of work is drawn from the Pacific cultural construct of the self as always already many. Hence, in my context a self-portrait, the use of self-portraiture, is a metaphorical representation of my current and past family, and a means of identifying the wider cultural and social framework that have affected us.

Furthermore the notion of other is not in opposition, it is both a mirrored image as well as an extension of self and is the ancestor. In other words the presence of other, and the othering of self, is not an alienating process, it is a connecting process. It is through my body that I connect intuitively to something, which I describe as otherness, a space of familiarity (ancestor) and it is through the intimate process of self-portraiture that I ‘face’ myself as other, as animal, and as ancestor.

Rather than fixed and discreet, for Deleuze and Guattari the individual is an ever-shifting being, a “desiring machine”, that can take on forms of animal-ness (or an animal capable of taking on forms of human-ness). Similarly, the term “becoming” allows for exchange between otherwise static conceptions of the world: man/nature, man/women, I/we, human/animal. (Thompson, 2005, p. 8)

That is to say a human may not become an animal but may engage the animal’s capacity and power. In this becoming, both animal and human are other than animal and human, something in-between.

According to Agamben (2004) in the text *The Open: Man and Animal*, Western thought has always privileged the ‘human’ through the belief that the ‘human’ was originally produced through the mysterious joining of the natural living body and a supernatural element. Agamben posits that instead of this notion we should consider that determining the boundary between human and animal is the fundamental operation that has decided and produced the nature of what is ‘man’. In other words it is the myth of Eden that has supplied us with the creation of ‘man’, which has led to our

divine right to privilege man over animal, human over inhuman, rather than determining that it is language that has differentiated us from our animal origin.

The starting point for creating monkey man was based on racial insults that I received in early childhood, where I was likened to a monkey as a way of ridiculing my black skin and facial features. The 3D digital head 'monkey man' was modelled using various reference images of apes and head shots of myself baring my teeth in a series of angry poses.



monkey man

3D Plaster Rapid
Prototype
2008

Exhibited in
Strengthening Sennit
St Paul St Gallery 3
2008

The intention was to synthesise these images and create a self portrait, that was at once sub-human yet self-referential and which in multiplying identity challenged assumptions about social strata, others and anthropological ancestral links. Baring my teeth in a hostile gesture was an expressive means to distort my face and to draw my upper lip in closer proximity to my flaring nostrils and furrowed brow. The structural features of the face, the protruding jawline, eye sockets and eyebrow, the receding short nose resembled an ape. My open mouth revealed the hollow cavity inside the 3D printed head and was intended to mimick the open mouthed clown-head games of carnival sideshows.

In the process of constructing this work I encountered a problem whereby the digital file became corrupted. Fortuouously I found a saved copy, and having altered some details, set about printing it off on the 3D rapid

prototyping machine. During the printing process the printer ran out of powder and hence a contingent event resulted in the production of a “topless”, or open-headed creature. This second opening revealed the empty head of “monkey man”, in other words the incomplete printing of the head invoked the supposedly reduced cognitive and kinesthetic abilities of “monkey man”.

A second mishap had occurred in the making of “monkey man” when the file corrupted and this imperfection is visible in a small gap in the lip. The texture that undulates the surface of monkey man is a series of materialised digital lines, perfect machine marks, and it is these incremental marks that delicately frame the small holes in the upper and bottom lip. These small holes in “monkey man” bear the trace of the digital glitch that I developed into another version of the work “file corrupted”.

“monkey man” was a turning point in my research project when I recognised that the imperfections and holes in the physical printing of “monkey man” had to some extent complicated the work by rendering it incomplete, a little grotesque. The corrupted digital file of “monkey man” was to a greater extent monstrous with the additional appendages created from the displaced vertices as well as from the darkness of the digital surface of the head and black background. By animating the corrupted digital file and creating a moving image work by turning the digital head under a single light source to reveal the front, back and sides of the model was in some way more animated than the white 3D printed head.

The transition from lightness to darkness that occurs in the resulting self-portrait renders the head at times a landscape, a surface, a cave, and a face that floats in darkness. This floating alludes to the notion that the rupture from ancestor leaves one suspended. In contrast “monkey man” was solid, white, heavy and determined. It had a physical presence that was too determined and complete. I favoured the 3D digital model as its animating capacity allowed the transition from darkness to light, a materiality that was lighter than “monkey man”, as well as the greater monstrosity inherent in the digital file. Thus a significant shift happened in that the self-portrait became partial and continually transforming. That is to say I had created a self-portrait in a state of becoming animal, and becoming inhuman, other than human.

A strict structure or a predetermined way of working does not function productively in my practice, as the work itself is concerned with the space of rupture, accident, and negation. Allowing for mishap to occur is necessary to my practice. In part it is incorrect to describe what I do as a practice. To practice alludes to a systematic, habitual engagement. In comparison to the structured and disciplined utilisation of time in modernity, my “practice” cannot appear other than sporadic, inconclusive and inept. Linearity implies

always progressing forward, a mode where what precedes is 'subordinate', naïve to what comes latter, a hierarchy of importance is established.

When viewed through island time, 'past and present merge in the cyclic rhythm of nature' (Awatere, 1984. p.62) where knowledge, a knowing, my practice, the way, is allowed time to evolve. My everyday way of working aims to give time and space for mishaps to occur. This other as mishap is the phantom of my process of making. It is this form of otherness that I search for and read into my project; it is this form of otherness developed in my practice that I then explore philosophically. In this instance I read this otherness, other, the unknown, the mishap, "hand of god", as the possibility of the ancestor's active presencing. I explore the notion of rupture, initiated through the work "file corrupted", as the threshold of the severing of self with this otherness, ancestor.

CHAPTER TWO: FILE CORRUPTED

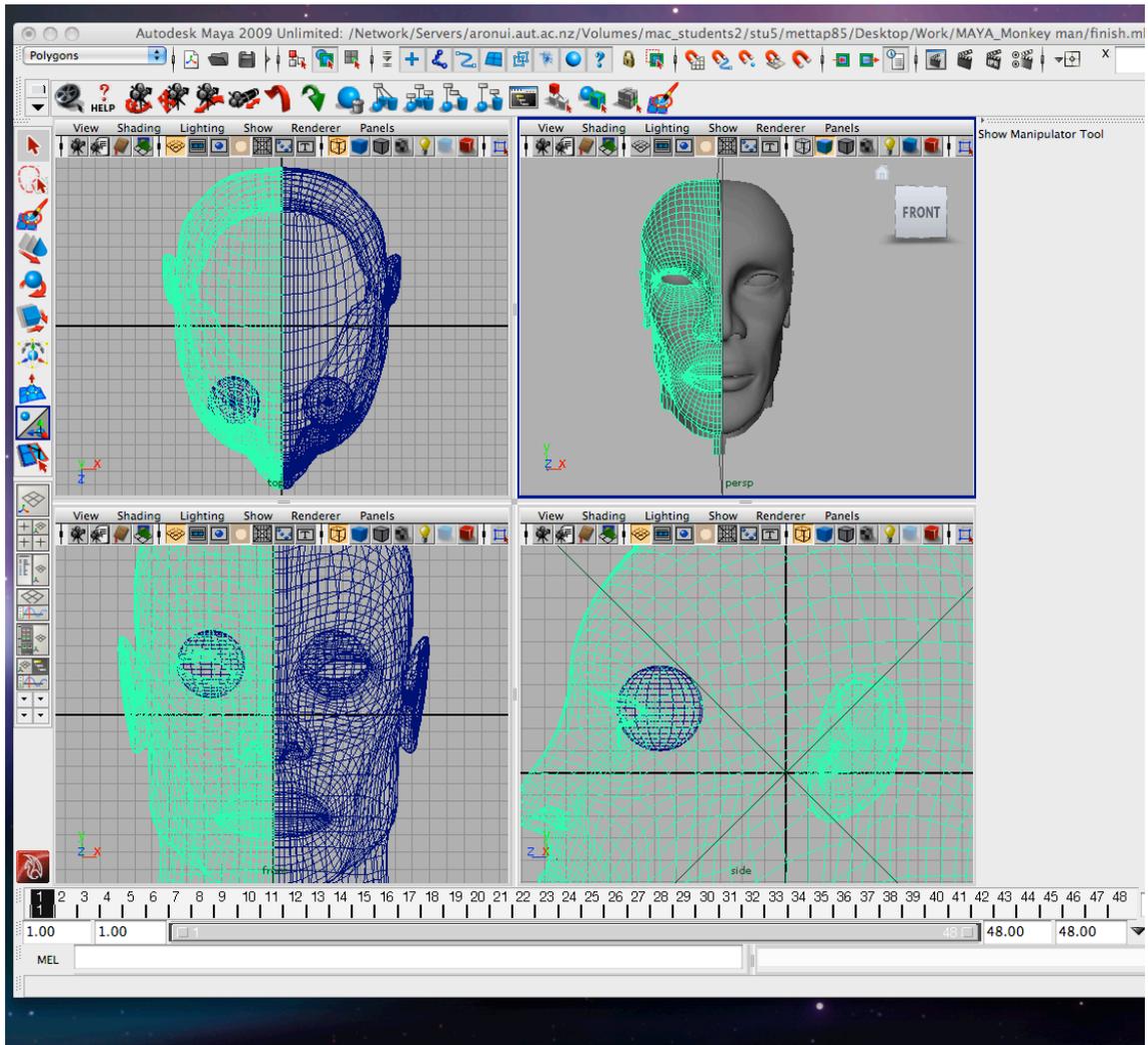
RUPTURE

Inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start.

Deleuze & Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*(2004)

In this chapter I will discuss issues pertaining to rupture and threshold through the work “file corrupted”. This was a digital work produced subsequent to “monkey man” and installed in the Tautai exhibition “Don’t Pacify Me” at St Paul Street Gallery under the curatorship of Charmaine ‘Ilaiu. This work evolved out of the same corrupted digital file that produced “monkey man”, as described in the previous chapter. The frustrating glitch had rendered the file potentially useless and unworkable. For some unknown reason the file, had frozen during the process of transformation and generation, leaving in its wake the visage of a kind of monstrous, hybrid being. Where I had originally set out to produce a hybrid self-portrait of a different sort, this involuntary immobilising act performed by the computer unexpectedly and surprisingly produced something unknowable and unexpected.

The rupture occurred on the seam, the fold of “monkey man”, between the left and right hemispheres of the head. The 3D model head comprises of two mirrored halves. I started with a generic head which I divided into half with a vertical split through the centre. The right side was then deleted. I sculpted the remaining surface and when I was satisfied I then mirrored this image and connected the vertices. Ideally this seam would be invisible, a seamless fusion for the head to appear whole. The glitch instead displaced a series of organised vertices, to create a ruptured rough surface along the otherwise invisible smooth join. This seam is site in which the work became undone and incomplete. The irrupted seam made visible the invisible, the boundary that negotiated difference rather than assimilation, and made present the mirrored other, and made visible the monstrous.



Digital 3D model of monkey man

screen shots
June 2009

“file corrupted” is the remnant surface of a digital glitch, a ruptured seam. A rendering of the unstable, the digital accident, a digitised mistake. The anti in the contradictory pursuit for digital perfection of a modelled, negative stereotype. It lay discarded in a digital waste land, unusable, unstable.

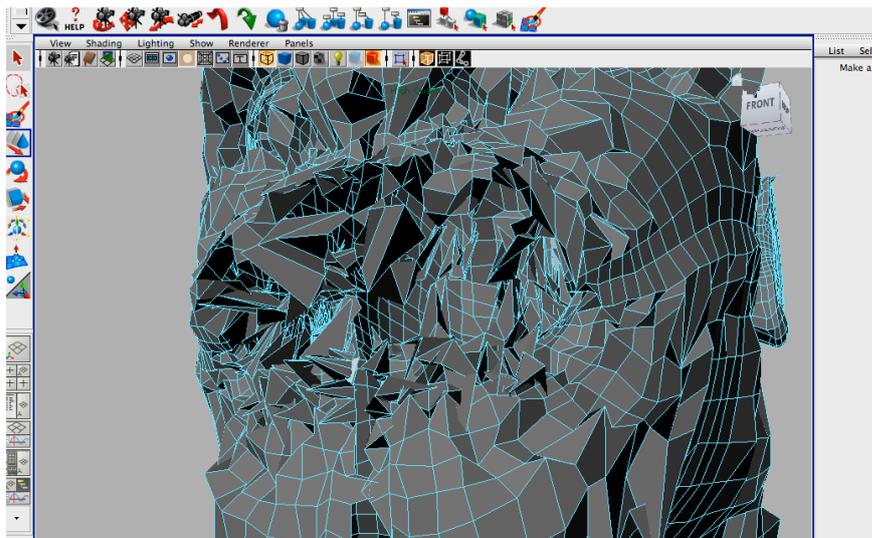
I read the corrupted coding of the file as a genealogical accident of the digital sort. Proper to the work’s genealogy are the parent images/models that sought to recreate a perfect melding that would result in “monkey man”. In its exposure to the contingent becoming of the digital making process what was erased was very nearly all trace of its predecessors. What is revealed is the corruption of the now invisible perfect parent file.

To reduce the head and face to coordinates of data, as in the process of 3D modelling, the face and head became a measured surface and a proportional system that corresponds to the gradient threshold from animal to human as explored in “monkey man”. These coordinates, vertices, act

as structuring device that holds the skin of the model in a certain shape. Through the corruption of the file the resulting displaced vertices punctuate the skin of the model that ultimately distorts the surface of the face.

As discussed in a preliminary way above, Deleuze and Guattari suggest the face is a kind of mechanism, what they call a “white wall/ black hole system“. What the mechanism brings into play is an intersection between ‘significance and subjectification’, to form a site for sensed and mental reality, through which an abstract machine of faciality is at play (2004, p. 186).

Importantly for the reading I am making here of “file corrupted”, they suggest the face is not the head; it is surface, separate to the body and is credited with producing ‘human’ visibility, the humanly visible. It is by way of the singularity of the face that the body itself is made human, is in fact facialized. The face gives subjectivity that is external to the body thus the face is not a relative but an absolute deterritorialization, separate to the body. As Deleuze and Guattari write, to induce faciality is to induce a means of control.



file corrupted

3D digital modelling file
2009

The face, what a horror. It is naturally a lunar landscape, with its pores, planes, matts, bright colors, whiteness, and holes: there is no need for a close up to make it inhuman; it is naturally a close-up, and naturally inhuman, a monstrous hood. Necessarily so because it is produced by a machine... (2004, p. 211)

The disassembled face of “file corrupted”, as an image composed from informational data, similarly shows a deterritorialized landscape and likewise suggests an abstract machine is in place. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) suggest the face is the form of a signifier. Faces are not individual,

they are zones that are frequented and predictable, they demarcate a field that makes, in advance, expression ineffective and gives things that are unnameable appropriate significations. They are sites that resonate intuitive and or conscious thought that in advance conforms to a dominant reality. The face is produced in an abstract machine of faciality and at the same time of its production the abstract machine, engenders a “white wall/ black hole system” where the face as signifier rebounds off the white wall and the black hole its subjectivity (2004, p. 186).

Could the glitch, mishap, be the voice of the ancestor? Could it be that the voice of the ancestor that disrupts. To rupture the facial surface, the face of Christ, the white face, the average White Man. To dislodge the, already ruptured and dislocated, the non-being, out of an internal death, suspended in a state of exception?

The glitch on one level disassembles the inhuman, monstrous face. Yet the face as a frequented and predictable zone conforms a dominant reality making the face humanly comfortable thus rendering the disassembled face of “file corrupted” monstrous. It is through the glitch I encountered something that is, multidimensional, contradictory, unpredictable and unforeseen.

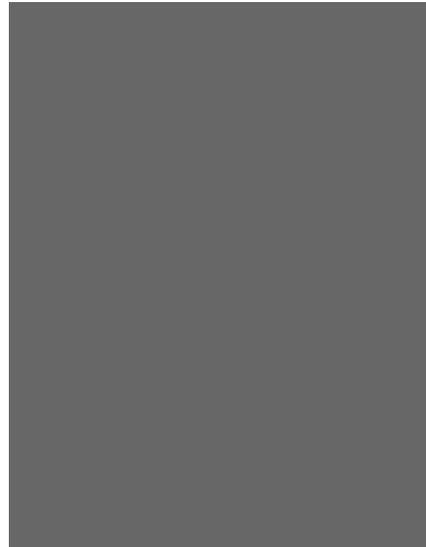
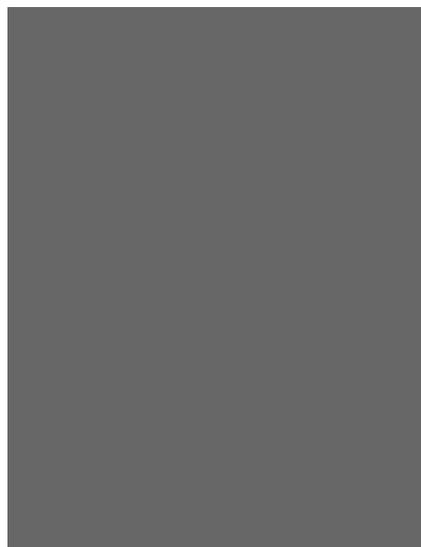
THRESHOLD

Ocean without shore is about the presence of the dead in our lives.

Bill Viola

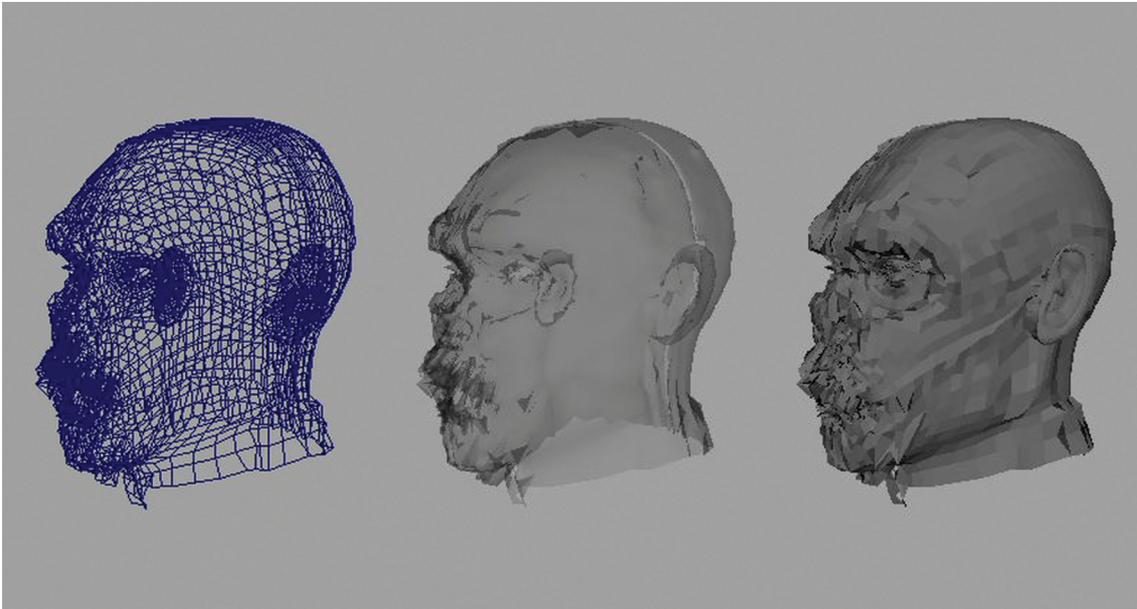
Ocean Without Shore

Bill Viola
Moving image
2007



In Bill Viola's video installation, "Ocean Without a Shore", made for the 2007 Venice Biennale, a series of individual figures are shown moving from obscurity to light, from black and white into colour, from ephemeral to solid form, by crossing through a cascading threshold of water, itself invisible until disturbed by their passage. In this work Viola attempts to signal, by way of the water's transparency and then presencing, the relative immediacy of the dead to the living and the passage of return to the world (Viola, 2007, p. 276).

Viola's threshold, barrier, is a site where between the two worlds the being has "... an intense moment of infinite feeling and acute physical awareness. Poised at this juncture, for a brief instant all beings can touch their true nature, equal parts material and ethereal" (Viola, 2007, p. 276).



Like Viola's "Ocean Without a Shore", "file corrupted" similarly sets up a threshold of intensity that has been created by the glitch and made visible as a ruptured surface. In this case the passage is fixed where the monstrous face suspends, revolving in a continuous motion from darkness to light. It can be seen to invoke a phantom that passes through various states or zones ranging between visibility and invisibility. This locale, in between light and dark, is its threshold of intensity.

file corrupted

3D digital modelling file
Skins
2009

Somewhere in the proximity of this threshold the monstrous turns in Plato's cave (1992, Part 7, section 7), trapped to view and understand shadow as real. Plato's analogy describes the state of a prisoner who is trapped in a cave and conditioned to see the world through shadows cast on a wall,

believing that the shadow world was the world itself. It is only through being released into the light, the real light of daylight, that he is opened into the world of the real; light is used as a metaphor for knowledge.

This idea of conditioned perception is of interest to me as not only a theme in which I explore through my work and as an idea that places the monstrous, other, “file corrupted” in the cave but also that the monstrous is revealed as a revolving surface that becomes the cave, the prison cell to say, in one instant and the dissembled face in the next instant. The validity of the light source in “file corrupted” is brought into question. One is left wondering if it is Plato’s fire light, a manufactured fabricated source of light that casts a shadow reality on the wall of the cave (prison) in which prisoners hold as the ‘real’, or is it the days light, the natural source from the sun, that holds true knowledge? In its turning “file corrupted” is in a state of constant becoming. In its turning the ruptured monstrous is never fully perceived and embraced by the light (knowledge) it is only ever partially exposed, partially held, a prison and a prisoner, neither one or the other.



file corrupted

moving image
2009

My interest lies in darkness as a source of knowing. It is not the lightness that it is in search of its liberation it is darkness. There are non-chains that bound it but a separation from the darkness that suspends it. The knowledge, illumination is found in the darkness where the ancestors lie.

Rather than exploring a shift from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living, as in Viola’s “Ocean Without a Shore”, my concern in self-portraiture is the estrangement of a dead self within the living self. In “file corrupted”

the self-portrait presents a dead self within the rendered surface that brings to light the underlying condition of disconnection, rupture, and the monstrous inhuman. Could it be that the dead self occurs, in the exterior of the cave, when part of the body is beyond the threshold but paused, fixed, suspended? Could it be that it precedes the exterior threshold? In its internalisation of cave, could the body then become part body and part cave surface? Could it be that it occurs in the exterior? Preceding the threshold, sited in the world of the living, in Plato's world of light, real reality, part body, fragmented, disconnected from the head ruptured. Disconnected and alienated from its ancestral self. Could it be that there is no body, only surface?

The rupture has offset the threshold between ancestor knowledge and self.



CHAPTER THREE: **WORKING MODEL**

PHANTOM IMAGE

On reflection of the trajectory of this research project, it is evident that in spite of myself, my practice has driven my philosophical concerns and over time my practice has revealed the key concepts underpinning this project the idea of a phantom state(s). Central to is the notion of rupture as discussed in the previous chapter and in this instance I read it as a severing within the self as other, as ancestor and animal. I will argue here, the phantom image is the remnant of this encounter.

I have divided this chapter into subsections where I will gradually unpack the ideas surrounding phantom image; firstly conditioning the phantom state establishes the use of stereotype in my work and discusses the relation between fabrication and phantom state. Then internalising fabrication considers a correlation between the Bethams panoptic maxim and the potential to internalise fabrication or phantom event. Later I discuss the relevance of phantom to my work and my exploration into rendering moving image phantom-like through the consideration of the work, “working model”.

CONDITIONING THE PHANTOM STATE

In the media world, the world as event disappears and becomes a mere image, a spectacle and likewise a phantom. Also, the people who appear in the media world become images, phantom like images and commodities ... At that historical moment when the reproduced form becomes socially more important than the original form

Peter Weibel

Through the frame of colonial discourse, I have been concerned to pursue “the ideological construction of otherness” (Bhabha, 1994, p.66), particularly in the arena of digital media. This has involved working specifically with stereotypes, which are, as Homi Bhabha has written, a “form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated“(Bhabha, 1994, p.66). By this Bhabha means that the stereotype ought to be recognised as a paradoxical mode of representation that “connotes rigidity and [an] unchanging order, as well as [trades on] disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition“ (Bhabha, 1994, p.66).

I have identified and utilised stereotypes as the critical basis of many of my works, including “monkey man”, “file corrupted”, and “working model”, whereby I hybridised them by way of self portraiture, thereby reformulating and counter-actualising their negative connotations. This practice of re-iteration aims to challenge their characteristic ideological claims by the very means that enforces them - social repetition.

The study on the perception and representation of the mobile unit of destruction, in Inigo Manglano-Ovalle’s “*Phantom Truck*” (2007) is particularly relevant to my research in relation to the shifting nature of identity and the notion of speculative as phantom and fabrication. I am interested in how we culturally receive and process information. There is an interesting case here of how one culture reads (or fabricates) the other, for their own purpose. The concept for this work was to make physical the otherwise speculative truck from collated descriptions and intelligence reports of mobile biological weapons labs in Iraq. This object of speculation was used to justify the US preemptive strike on Iraq, that then was later revealed as a fabricated fact. The phantom truck is a hybrid of photographed and drawn materials from Kurdish and U.S military forces and an idealized form of biological truck was formed.

Phantom Truck
Inigo Manglano-Ovalle
Installation
Documenta
Kassel, Germany 2007



I stand in a room with windows that give way to daylight. The light is muted, a red tint, it appears natural, within the glass not as an adhesive or appendage. The

sound of static occasionally disturbs the space. I am in The Radio.

I walk through to the next room my eyes see only a grey clouded mass, I scan for some sort of 'thing', a light, a guide, as I am uneasy in my footing. I am in darkness. My eyes are slow to adjust. I am in darkness... the phantom truck begins to appear. Mediated by natural light and visible only as the light changes or ones eyes adjust to the darkness the phantom truck appears as an apparition. A full-scale mobile biological weapons lab. On closer inspection and investigation its nature as a replica and only a shell of a replica is revealed.

This installation opens my reading of darkness to perform a twofold operation: to conceal the phantom (as fabricated lie) and expose the phantasy (as desire). Mangano-Ovalle's use of two different rooms one with a red light the other a dark space sets in motion the play of light on the eyes. As the viewer moves from the red space to the darkened space the truck is slowly revealed as a phantom as the eyes adjust to the dark environment.

INTERNALISING FABRICATION

In the following section I will discuss Bentham's panoptic principle as a way of understanding how a fabricated reality is perceived as reality by a process of internalisation. Bentham's panoptic maxim was the notion that "transparency and visibility would deter delinquent behavior" (Weibel, 2002, p. 212). The architectural structure for the panoptic prison was to expose the inmate and to make the inmate visible at all times to a guard who was hidden in the central tower. This exposure, transparency, presumably manifests a fear of the gaze thus altering behaviour in prison and how one acts and performs in society. In a similar way to the panoptic maxim could the internalisation of a fabrication alter the way in which a culture performs? Could acting out the fabrication or counter-actualising the fabrication, of which the process of internalising is a subjective response, render the fabrication real and in turn the culture or the fabricated, phantom?

An alternative view is that the material reality is replaced by the virtual, the real becomes the image and the imagined becomes the real. Žižek (2002) notes this idea manifests itself in the movie the Matrix where the material reality is a virtual experience, and the real a desolate landscape. The Matrix is a parody of processes that reflect post-modern imaging. The desired is the image, the constructed advertised reality, a progressive American cityscape with all the values of commodity, progress and technology, the

American “dream’. In contrast the undesired, an invisible, hidden and discarded, constructed “real”. A world as a desolate landscape devoid of all modern pleasures, dull, lifeless and grey. This division is monitored, constructed, made visible and invisible by a powerful calculating machine of probability, a mega computer, a data processor, which determines monitors and influences both worlds.

The idea that the world is nothing more than a radical illusion has challenged every great culture and it has been resolved through art and symbolization. What we invented in turn, in order to tolerate this kind of suffering, is a simulated real capable of supplanting the real and bringing about its final solution: a virtual universe from which everything dangerous and negative has been expelled. And the Matrix entirely belongs to that process. Everything has to do with dream, utopia, and fantasy is given expression, “realized”. It is a world of integral transparency. (Baudrillard, 2005, p.22)

The ‘real’, culture to be fabricated, is supplanted not in order to tolerate a kind of suffering but as a way to impose a value system of commodification. The suffering comes from the rupture of performing fabrication and commodification in the community, the market place and a knowing of the culture that is now made other and alienated. There is still an element of the panoptic maxim in play in that at its core is the fear of the gaze. It is not that transparency and visibility exposes delinquency but that the fear of not being seen as a commodity or to be seen as other, of which are associated to being inferior, modifies behaviour.

file corrupted
projection

AUT campus, Auckland
June 2009



RENDERING PHANTOM: *working model*

Through various experiments I have attempted to render “file corrupted” - it’s fabrication inherited through the genealogy of ‘monkey man’ - as a phantom. In the group exhibition “Don’t Pacify Me” light levels of the room matched (by chance) the level of light emitted from the projector thus rendering the frame, threshold image and surface of the ‘real’ world, invisible and the image phantom-like and transparent. So to further play with rendering ‘file corrupted’ phantom I did a series of experiments called the ‘WJ block’ series. The work was projected in various lighting conditions against various surfaces. I used a red light bulb to light a room in which I then projected the moving image work against a white wall attempting to strip away the frame in order to float the image in space. The frame still remained and the moving image did not shift from an image projected onto a wall and its floating element remained within the parameters of it being a projection on a surface. Then in a similar fashion to Manglano-Ovalle’s installation, I attempted to use two rooms, one dark and one red, to explore

the potential the transformation of space over time as the eyes adjusted to the darkness. This failed as the size of the spaces was too small for the eyes to be conditioned sufficiently by each respective room.

I then experimented with the surface on which to project by testing a range of tones from off whites to greys and blacks. The most successful was the black, as the black fabric created a background void causing “file corrupted” to float in space. Unfortunately I could not make the frame invisible and therefore not yet achieve the desired phantom-like state.

You're not thinking forth dimensionally, 2009.

David Lawrey and Jaki Middleton

Kinetic sculpture MCA, Sydney



In Lawry and Middleton’s “You’re not thinking fourth dimensionally” (2009) a moving train appears as an apparition, a ghost-like phantom. A model of a landscape sits on stilts, behind glass in a dark room. The light within the work illuminates the mountainous range and low-lying meadow. The sound of a rattling train can be heard but not seen until it is made visible as a ghostly apparition running through the landscape.

By using simple visual devices, a reflected image of the moving object was produced on glass and by balancing the lighting conditions, Lawry and Middleton were able to achieve a phantom-like state. Though their work is sculptural and object orientated I took the principle technical concerns, to balance light and dark, and achieve a borderless reflection on glass. I began to engage rendering moving image phantom-like in physical space by dissolving the frame and background of the moving image. This was finally achieved through considering the physical qualities of how an image is reflected in glass and then carefully balancing and positioning the areas of light and dark in the physical space to render the glass invisible and the image phantom-like.

Quick initial experiments were made using a cardboard box as the enclosed structure to control light and dark, a portable DVD player was used as a projecting mechanism and “file corrupted” as the moving image work. The monitor sat opposing the glass sheet and given the monitor angle and the lighting condition were right the grey reflected frame of the monitor dissolved and ‘file corrupted’ was rendered phantom-like.

The most successful of these experiments was the use of an open-ended cardboard box in the studio. “file corrupted” became part of the “landscape”



WJ Series

Projection Installation experimentation with file corrupted

AUT, Auckland August, 2009

of the studio space, opening up to something bigger than itself, less isolated and contained but also in some way because of its minute scale in space insignificant. The success of this test was intrinsically dependent on the lighting condition in the studio space thus as the space contained natural light during the day which traversed different positions in the space over time, I had to continually adjust the position of all the individual elements in the test work. Thus I looked to a more permanent structure to play with and a work that would sit in the physicality of a space. This was achieved through the work, “working model”.



Phantom experiments

Multimedia
Studio, Auckland

October 2009

The title “working model” is a play on words; the working model as an accessible platform to test work in, the redundant stone like adze that’s sits on a mock stage, a prop, a tool, and the sweeping brown figure of a Polynesian cleaner a phantom-like image, symbolic commodity, a model worker. Exhibited in the group show “Glitch”, St Paul St Gallery, November 2009 the work, a model with a phantom image enclosed in a box, was displayed on a black plinth in amongst a range of moving image work, in a dark gallery space. The absence of spot lighting on the exterior of the custom wood box coupled with the presence of light and movement from a large projection and performing body (dancer) in its immediate background,



dwarfed the static plinth and box, making the installation of “working model” in Glitch unassuming and potentially unseen by the viewer.

Constructed into the framework of “working model”, but invisible to the viewer, is a monitor projecting an image against a sheet of glass. This glass sheet sits between monitor and a rudimentary stage with a black backdrop and stone adze as a prop. The reflective quality of the moving image against glass appears as a ghostly apparition that sweeps its way across the stage. The moving image subject is a cleaner, sweeping with her (my) back to the viewer. This was recorded in a black photography room as a result of initial experiments revealed the colour black renders invisible when projected against glass. Thus the reduction of background noise by making it invisible furthers the phantom-like quality.

The manner in which phantoms are made present suggest absence of the real. The focal point of the Polynesian cleaner as phantom is to engage the stereotype of cleaner associated to Pacific people. The etymology of Polynesia means ‘many islands’ and is a European word to describe their demarcation of geographical locals based on ethnographic similarities between different cultures. My use of “Polynesian” in this instance is to elicit the notion of “Polynesian” as a kind of fabrication thus the absence of the real behind this fabrication. So to the absence of Cook Islands Maori in this exegesis and titles of work, whose presence in a historical context is inseparable from punishment and bastardization, evidences a subordination of a language and a people and broadly reflects an absence of our self-determinacy, our real and of our ancestral other.

working model

Install at Glitch & detail
Multi-media & moving
image
500 X 400 X 1000mm

November, 2009



working model

interior detail
Multi-media & moving
image

November, 2009

image credit: Janet Lilo

The ancestor manifests itself in our skin, our language, our knowledge and ritual, our customs, whether one maintains or challenges it. The connection is knowing, a knowing through the skin, through language, through ritual and custom. It is in our humour, our creative making and in a way it is an indefinable way. It is just known. It is a peculiar stance to maintain the performance of absence as discussed, this is not an overt attempt to re-connect to ancestor but simply amplifying what is. Inverted is Wyatt-Gills description of the invisible idol 'the little house' a box, where the invisible idol now made visible commodity, the phantom worker.

Through the temporal rhythm of moving image, space is experienced through time. That is to say the interior space of "working model" is experienced through the temporal aspect of the moving phantom apparition. The sweeping motion is undertaken from left to right in repeated linear moves yet through the repetition of movement, the moving image on loop, a cyclic rhythm is present, a never-ending. There is a dynamic play of scale when the gigantic physical human viewer views the miniature digital human. "working model" sits as a world in a world, a phantom posited in the real. In developing this work further I am faced with several questions; how to scale up the phantom image that has been achieved in the small working model from a small-modelled space into the physicality of a larger space; how should I place the miniature "working model" in relation to the gigantic "file corrupted" in relation to the dimension of a large room?

FINAL INSTALLATION

These forms of projection of the body-the grotesque, the miniature, and the microcosm-reveal the paradoxical status of the body as both mode and object of knowing, and of the self constituted outside its physical being by its image.

Susan Stewart On Longing (1993)

As the exegesis precedes the final installation this section and as my research is practice led where ideas stem from the making, this section is indicative of the dynamics at play in my research practice in preparation for the final installation.

The presence of darkness in the installation allows for a space to open and that contain its own sense of time and sensory awareness. The darkness

ranges from a heavy, overbearing weight that pulsates an energy that draws one into the void to an array of greys that mute the tonality of light. It is the potential, a trace of something in the absence that holds the viewer. This trace, this other is ancestor. To place the viewer in a heavily darkened space only allows for a minimal amount of light and thus a minimal amount of projected moving image work.

The head of "file corrupted" shifts between dark space and faint line of light, that slowly turns like the phases of the moon to reveal the monstrous face. The head as part self-portrait, is I as many, is read as the condition of a socio-cultural group that is ruptured from its ancestor suspended in space. The problematic is to project this work with a minimal amount of light in the physical space whilst rendering it phantom.

There is an exteriority to the way in which 'file corrupted' is displayed in contrast to the interior hidden display of 'working model'. One must take time to seek out its interior, to discover the work as its exterior is unassuming. Looking into "working model", the audience is faced with the back of the miniature figure that through the sweeping action draws an invisible line across an ambivalent ground. The frontal aspect of "working model" is the face of the audience looking in perhaps catching a glimpse of their reflection on an invisible plane.

The juxtaposition between the works is awkward. The scale of the projected head in "file corrupted" is gigantic in comparison to the miniature figure of "working model". The digital head has physical dominance over the miniature human figure and further the viewer. Likewise the boxed fabricated figure is dwarfed by the real human figure. An ambiguous state of stillness and movement is created through the slowly revolving, pivoted head, the sweeping staged space and the viewer navigating from one work to the next.

The moving image works evoke a meditative quality, a holding of the viewer. The experiential is through the eyes. Through this the body is then encapsulated by the work.

CONCLUSION

I AM A MAKER.

I am not god, though I maybe a monster, a monster descended from monsters.

That is what you would have me believe.

In conclusion the project has given face to ideas utilised in many of my works that trace back to before this project. Fabrication has given face to an identity coiled in a history of colonisation. Mishap has given face through rupture explored as a tenet that separates the self from ancestor and the possibility to be ancestor that awakens an internal death. So to is an important aspect in my methodological process a presencing of something other than. Darkness has been discussed as a mode of power and creativity, a concept then skewed for the purpose of colonisation and revealed as another potential space for ancestor. A space that holds it own time that this project is embodied by.

**IMAGE
ARCHIVE
OF FINAL
INSTALLATION**



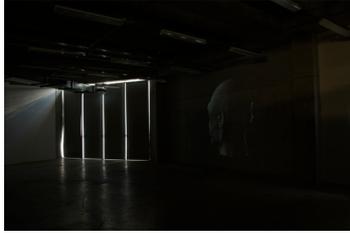


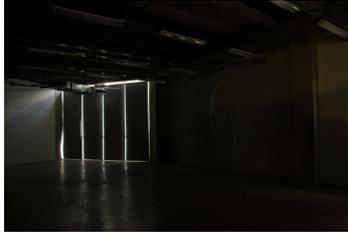
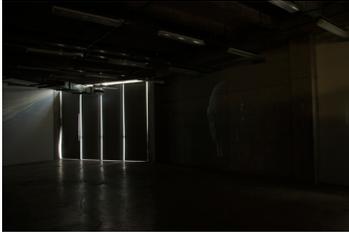




file corrupted

animation/moving image, install in AUT, WM 306



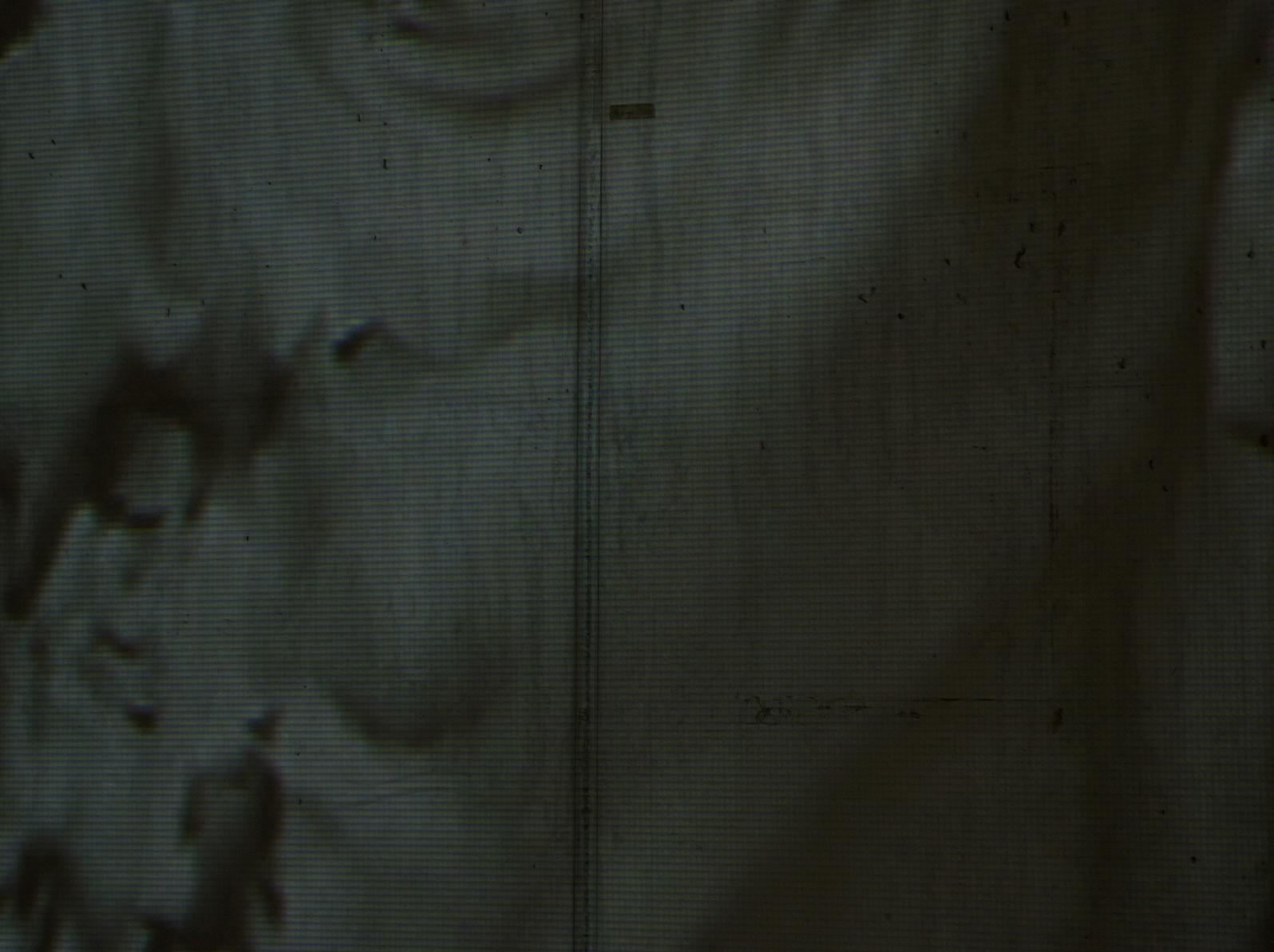


file corrupted

transformation of work and room over time

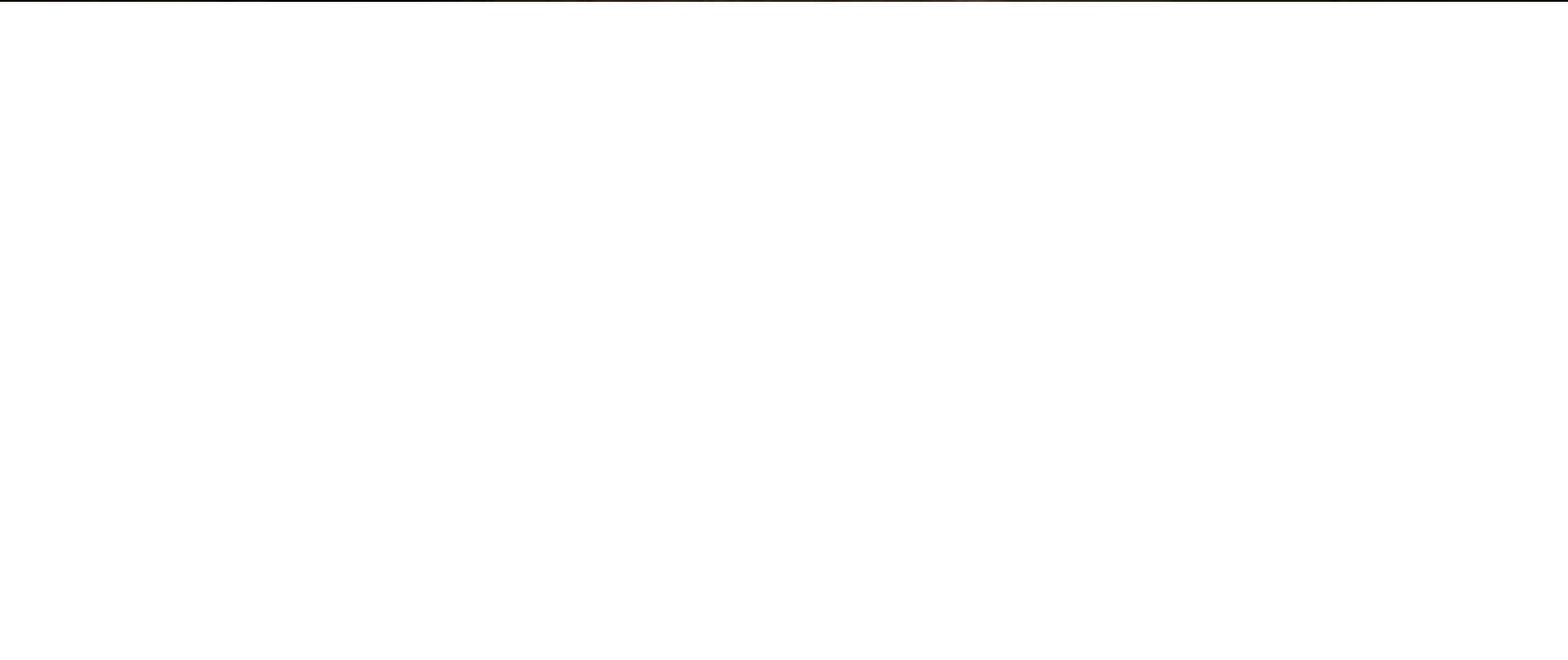






file corrupted

detail of projection on wall





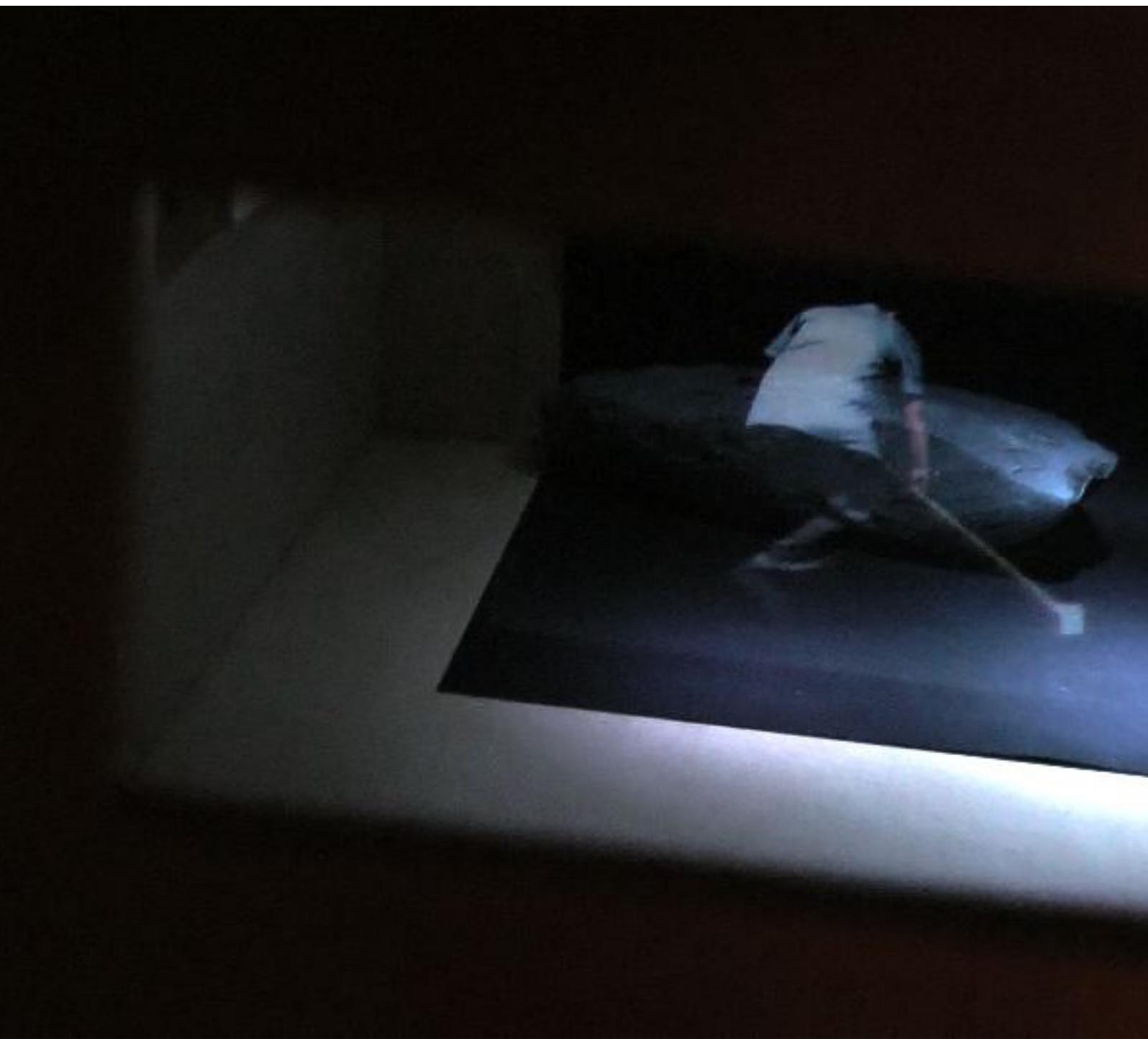
working model

multimedia, install in WM 306











working model

detail of the interior

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