

Performing the Loop



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Test*. 2010, still photograph.

Ruth Susan Myers

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Primary Supervisor: Chris Braddock

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For Judith Myers

Who taught me to look

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Performing the Loop

1.0 Abstract

Situated between sculptural and body art practices this project explores the phenomenological lived-body through the artist's body in reflexive activity as both subject and object. A specific focus explores the lived body as not able to be got to; positioned within a loop of continual deferral and becoming in the chiasmic fold of flesh. To this end studio methods include the use of an 'embodied' lens, positioned physically and spatially within the momentum of my bodily activity. As such, private actions and sculptural endeavours are located as lacking resolve and deeply subjective. This project prioritises process rather than product and employs the lens to enable performative documents, performing the work as moments of encounter within a bodily incoherence. This thesis project is constituted as 80% practice-based work accompanied by a 20% exegesis.

1.1 Introduction

Performing the Loop explores the phenomenological body through a focus on exploring its own perceived limits. Informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notions of lived body, flesh and chiasm, the concept of the body is opened up into a continually negotiated encounter with the world.

Situated between sculptural and body art practices *Performing the Loop* engages the body of the artist in activity as both subject and object, tooled and mediated through the lens. These activities are focused on the specific task of getting to the body as it is experienced as "my point of view upon the world" (Merleau-Ponty as cited in Sobchack, 1992 p.39). The body is invested, it is gendered and social, and in activity rigorously engaged with as object and subject.

While there is a purpose, a sense of use in these activities, there is an ambiguity underlying these actions that position the body/self in processes that are mutually porous. In this the body is unable to be got to, never fully there and never fully gone. This calling for and relinquishing body performatively¹ inhabits and conditions spatially through a body caught up in process.

Performing the Loop is less interested in the discourses of photography and more located in the fields of performance and sculptural activity. While holding the camera in one hand, I manipulate my body and sometimes material in private performance.

Performing the loop relies on performative documents to perform a body always compromised, and which implicates others in this embodied lack of resolve. These bodies don't make sense, but as flesh they are sensible.

¹ *Performing the Loop* is interested in the notion of performativity ... "as *process* rather than an act with a final goal" (Jones, 1999, p.1). This stance has been further informed by Philip Auslander (2006): "I am using the term performative in J.L.Austin's most basic sense. Speaking of language, Austin calls statements whose utterance constitutes action in itself performatives...Distinguishing performative utterances from constative utterances, Austin argues that to "utter (a performative sentence) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: *it is to do it*. (p.5).

This project has spanned several years of study and shifted through significant experimental and exploratory phases during its course. These phases have been linked by a focus on embodied looking, firstly in places and things and then my body. These phases have been documented in abbreviated form in 6.0 Studio Developments while the body of the exegesis is written to expose the underpinning framework and contextualise *Performing the Loop's* final resolve. At the time of writing decisions around the physical placement of images within the exhibition space were still being considered and will be amended to the exegesis along with documentation of the final presentation of *Performing the Loop*.

Chapter One

Phenomenological Body



Myers, Ruth, *Hand/glove walking*, 2009, still photograph.

I put the clay over my hand as a tool to go looking ...but in the end the tool took over. I had the strange experience of being inside and outside of myself.

Hand/glove walking is a pivotal work for a number of reasons. Firstly it forced me to rethink my own perceptions or ‘knowing’ of body. I was un-edged, unbounded and experienced a loss of sense of body as I had ‘pictured’ it. *I was not contained and nor was anything else*, but in that, this new found ‘expanded’ body opened up into a continually negotiated, opening/encounter with the world. Two things, I theorize, were taking place: an engagement with what existentialist phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty discusses as flesh of the chiasm, and, in this, a drive to take up the lived body. *Hand/glove walking* drew me to the realisation that this embodiment was the project’s ‘location’. This placed my body, not as bystander or partner to, but as I live it, in and at the heart of the matter².

² This ‘rethinking’ of my body has been informed by Amelia Jones’ writings on Body Art practices as being shaped by phenomenology and feminist poststructuralism (1998). Jones references to Merleau-Ponty’s notions of lived

The lens, held in close to my body by my other hand, became a crucial tool to physically and conceptually fold, the subject object loop of my body/self.³ The resultant images or ‘stills’ selected out of images taken within the activity, perform the lens from this embodied, spatial, and physically (rather than visually) prioritised positioning.

Drawing on sculptural and body art practices these momentary and incidental images out of activity performatively document the body tirelessly and relentlessly exploring its own limits.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

2.0 Lived Body, Flesh and Chiasm

Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments as if by magic, since it is ours and because through it we have direct access to space. For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions. (Merleau-Ponty as cited by Nemser, 1971 in Warr p.233)

The phenomenological notion of the lived-body is different to the idea of the physical body, in that the lived-body cannot be separated from the self. Merleau-Ponty suggests the lived-body can be thought about as “the expressive space by which we experience the world” (as cited by

body, embodied subjectivity, and flesh and chiasm, and her analysis in how these play out in work involving the body of the artist have been particularly useful in considering how I am using my body in Performing the Loop.

³ Lived-body termed by Jones (1998) as body/self.

Jones, 1999 p. 63). This expressive space is conditioned by reflexivity where the body is opened out in the world to the input of others (Jones).

My lived body is able to perceive and express, and at the same time to be an object for others to perceive and express. In this I am both subject and object. This simultaneous reversibility, where I am always both at the same time, is what Merleau-Ponty means by fold or opening in the world (Sobchack, 1992).

We have to reject the age old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body...Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?...not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated...so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen". (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.138)



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

In these activities I am both subject and object, acting on myself and by myself; acting on and to. This came about in practise embedded in process; in what I am doing⁴. I am both lost body and looking body, in this, *other* with myself.

In getting to this point—to this performative loop—I had been studiously and determinedly working the ‘gap’; the in-between (my body to thing, to other body). The ‘edge’—the other side of the ‘gap’—I had previously unquestionable felt to be there ‘fell away’. I felt my body unhinged, un-edged, shift beyond its perceived edges. My body expanded; it looped; it threw itself forwards and backwards, all ways. Yet this ‘expanded’ body sat with me, requiring to be treated as an object but was always beyond me as unreachable subject.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

⁴ This project begins with the drive to ‘bodily look’ in response to the loss of my mother. This embodied looking, first in objects and places, then to the body/self have guided this project. Heuristic methodology especially as informed by Moustakas, C. (1990). Heuristic research: design, methodology, and applications was particularly significant for allowing the involvement of ‘self’ within the research process.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Test*, 2010, still photograph.

Merleau-Ponty's *Flesh* is not matter, but a condition, an element, 'the formative medium of the object and the subject' (1968, p.147): "Every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 266).

Enacting the double touching of perception, Merleau-Ponty (as cited in Sobchack, 1992) states:

... When my right hand touches my left, I am aware of it as a 'physical thing'. But at the same moment, if I wish, an extraordinary event takes place: here is my left hand as well starting to perceive my right... Thus I touch myself touching; my body accomplishes "a sort of reflection." ... The relationship is reversed, the touched hand becomes the touching hand, and I am obliged to say that the sense of touch is here diffuses into the body-that body is a "perceiving thing," a "subject-object. (p. 117)

This reversibility as expressed by double touching of hands is never fully realised. This escaping is not a failing but chiasmic "clearings" (p.148) in my flesh and the world within which is "...the advent of difference" (1968, p.217).

Through such reflexive double touching *Performing the Loop* enacts this space of clearing, the momentum of the chiasm.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

2.1 Embodied subjectivity

I am always implicated and interested in the world and with it, always of its flesh, always in the process of completing and disclosing its meanings as my own. I cannot “be” otherwise (Sobchack, 2002, 39-40).

Through this project, arriving at an understanding of my embodied⁵ subjectivity poses a continual complex questioning of who the body belongs to in all of its social, political and physical being in the world. I am body/self, but in that, I am also body/object. I am perplexed by my femaleness in this. Within this folding I am acted on and I act to. This means even in the smallest of my actions, or the most un-gendered of my body, in the very aspect of my doing, I can never escape this embodied questioning. This continual making and remaking of my subjectivity is intersubjective as well as intrasubjective (Jones, 1998). It is embodied. It is lived.

⁵ Sobchack (2004) describes embodiment as: “a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and the consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an irreducible ensemble. Thus we matter and we mean through processes and logics of sense-making that owe as much to our carnal existence as they do to our conscious thought” (p.4).



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

2.2 Subjectivity in process

Amelia Jones (1998) describes Body Art as work that involves the enactment of the artist body/self in some way. Jones suggests it is the intersubjective exchange between Body artists

performative exposure of their body/self—their embodied subjectivity and positioning as author and object in relation to the audience—that constitutes the art work. This Jones suggests dissolves the Cartesian subject, the disembodied transcendent ‘I’ and “...surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body/self (or the body-as-subject) and its inability to deliver itself fully...” (p. 34).

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons

Lynda Benglis, *Now*. 1973, colour videotape still.

In Lynda Benglis’s video performance *Now* (1973) her profile is multiplied and positioned as if responding to each other, “... one kisses another, sucks her protruded tongue, orders her around...Benglis voice (both on and off camera) directs someone...start the camera...Now” (Jones, 1996, pp 225-226). Performing endlessly, looped, as simultaneous subject and object, Benglis positions the audience as both “controlling author” and “superfluous” (p.226). Pleasuring herself and being simultaneously subject of pleasure and object of viewing, Jones argues Benglis “enacts an aggressive narcissism” which collapses “... the distinction between the subject who desires and she who is desired” (1996 p.226). This is a performance of narcissism as “other directed” rather than self centered, and one in that Benglis explores her embodied subjectivity through her own self relation (p. 226).

In *Performing the Loop*, my body, tooled through the embodied lens is subject and object, author and other of, and through a particular positioning of the imaged body implicates the viewer as being both potentially part of, but also Other to this loop.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

2.3 Where is my gender?

In *Performing the Loop* activities are focused on the specific task of getting to or holding onto the body as it is experienced from my particular body: “my point of view upon the world” (Merleau-Ponty as cited in Sobchack, 1992, p.39).

While situated in *Performing the Loop* with some ambiguity, my body/self is gendered and social.⁶ It is rigorously engaged with as object-subject. It is in process; torn and pulled, squeezed and squashed, prised open and opened, tough and frail, held and lost. It can't stand still; it can't be edged or made solid or whole. It is never fully 'there' and never fully gone.

Laura Marks brings our attention to what she calls 'embodied blocks' (2000, p.152)⁷ and suggests phenomenology did not initially recognize a degree of 'trauma' in embodiment. Marks refers us to Iris M Young's 1977 essay "Throwing like a girl" in which Young (1998,a) reflects on Merleau-Ponty's lack of questioning around whether sexed and gendered bodies express different subjectivities. Young (1998) explores 'feminine' ways of moving, and being in space through a focus on bodily movement for a specific purpose or task. She suggests in feminine bodily existence, the body may be lived as a thing, as well as a capacity, and can simultaneously experience intentionality as an "I can" with an accompanying I cannot' (p. 265). Young suggests that "...overlaid with immanence..." parts of the feminine body may not move towards the accomplishment of a task (Young, 1998).



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

⁶ Performing the loop's body to body thinking has been particularly focused on the loss of my mother's body, which reflexively became part of my body/self.

⁷Vasseleu (1998, p.33) "Merleau-Ponty resists ...reduction of the chiasm to the female body...consistent with his description of the carnal body ... 'between the pure subject and the pure object a third genus (genre or gender) of being' ... the chiasm is a structure of 'implication' ... or a folding of opposites together so they are also mutually reversed." Vasseleu discusses questions raised by Irigaray about the "chiasm being sexually indistinct" (34).

Chapter Two

Performing the lens



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Test*, 2010, still photograph.

3.0 Performative Documents

Questioning the relationship between what I am doing and what I bring to an audience eventually drew me to the conclusion that it was not what the work *is* that matters, but what it *does*. By necessity of requiring a lived-body that is tooled and mediated through the lens, *Performing the Loop* relies on documentation. Phillip Aulander's notion of the 'performative document'⁸ as enabling the (2006, p.9) '...document itself as performance, is useful in describing that these images have their own work to do.

⁸ Jones(1997) argues that while there is physical difference experiencing performance 'live' to experiencing documentary traces, that neither offer a more true or privileged access to the artists intentions, or is any less mediated.

The body here ‘is not self sufficient in its meaningfulness’ but Jones (1997) suggests requires both an ‘authorial context’ and a ‘receptive context’ for the viewer to interact (p.14). Through this ‘documentary exchange’ between ‘viewer/reader<->document’ (1997, p.12) body art emphasises that the body is both ‘there’, but, unknowable through vision, also always absent. (Jones, 1998) This reliance on documentary traces Jones states (1997) “flaunts the body itself as loss or lack” where the documentary trace, could be said to “expose the body itself as supplementary, as both the visible “proof” of the self and its endless deferral” (p.14). This deferral is particularly useful in exploring body as that that can’t be got to.

Performing the Loop are not clear documents because in some way they are removed self consciously from their making. They do not begin or end because they do not move past their moment of enactment. They perform a body, but a body always compromised, and they implicate others in this embodied lack of resolve. These bodies don’t make sense, but as flesh they are sensible.



Myers, Ruth, Tests, 2009-2010, still photographs.

3.1 Embodied Lens

Performing the Loop is situated between sculptural and body art practices. Positioning the lens provides a tool for instrumenting the body both as lived and as sculpturally ‘worked’ within space and activity. The lens is not prioritised in a photographic way. It is not employed with an

emphasis on making a photograph, rather, in method and intention, the lens embeds body and activity performatively in each other as performative documents from an embodied 'in use' or performing of the lens.

Sobchack's *The address of the eye: a phenomenology of film experience*, while focused on cinematic experience, is useful in thinking about how embodied perception and spectatorship—mediated by the lens in still photography—are understood in *Performing the Loop's* performative images of the body in activity. For Sobchack film is an extension of the spectators embodied experience. In this, there is a phenomenological presence of the body in seeing as well as an acceptance of a mutual making of self and other. Film viewing can be thought of as an embodied exchange between the body of the viewer and the body of the film. Cinematic vision can be thought about as 'doubled' (1992, p.24). The lens inhabits and gives access to the world. As Sobchack (1992) states:

The camera ... marks its perceptive coherence in the *existential performance of materially embodied perception*. Its perception is prominently visible in its activity of perceiving a world and constituting its viewing-view/viewed-view as the expression of perception...it makes its presence to the world (and to us) sensible through its materialized activity of looking ... Its activity inscribes, therefore, an occupation of substantial space by a substantial and embodied eye. (p.209)



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

The lens, through both its mediated and embodied positioning enacts the ‘loop’. Its positioning as being embodied in the activity is crucial. Close up beside my body, as an extension and other to, ‘in’ the activity and looking on, the lens is the pivot or separation, the clearing upon which I simultaneously fold as subject/object. The lens holds this position. It intrudes. It subjectifies and objectifies, cuts off and asserts. It provides an embodied, folding, subject object ‘eye’, within my ‘in process’ embodied dilemma that is the lived body. This is a deeply reflexive positioning of the lens that asks something of the self and body, author and subject, and in turn the viewer.

Looking through the lens is something I need to do very carefully from this embodied eye. There is a bigger scene or activity going on, within which the lens is physically and spatially rather than visually prioritized. I am interested in the momentum of the activity rather than its visuality. To aid this I take a lot of images and edit. These images belong to a larger body, but not one I am interested in revealing, rather the clearing, as in Merleau-Ponty’s reflexive chiasm that is simultaneously lost and found within.

Myers, Ruth, *Loop*, Tests,
2010, still photographs.



Through the positioning of the lens and subsequent truncations of the body, there is a suggestion this body could be the viewers, although the viewer knows very well the body imaged is not their own. This is because it is “perceived by the viewer as a ‘There, where I am not,’ as the space consciously and bodily inhabited and lived by an ‘other’ whose experience of being-in-the-world, however anonymous, is not precisely congruent with the viewers own” (Sobchack, 1992: p.10). The ambiguous and contradictory implication in these images, in that no ‘driving’ body is figured, only those parts most tied up in ‘activity’. As Sobchack reminds us it is important to

remember the embodied lens is not anthropomorphized, “... the precise materiality of camera vision suggests both similarities (of function) to and differences (in nature) from human vision” (2004, p. 298).

As embodied spectators we know the film's body is not the same as our own. Sobchack highlights this through discussing Robert Montgomery's 1946 film, *Lady in the Lake*, in which the film's body pretends to be the central character Phillip Marlowe's, by being filmed as if it is his body. This reinforces our occupation of our own bodies and therefore the “... perceptive and expressive behaviour of the film is *curtailed* and *constrained* by bodily existence rather than *enabled* by it” (2002, p. 245).



Myers, Ruth, *Loop*, Test, 2010, still photograph.

3.2 Haptic Visuality

Building on the stance of the phenomenological embodied viewer, Marks' discussion of haptic visibility as a vision located in the body, and where the “eyes themselves function like organs of touch” (2000, p.162). This is useful in informing the performative ‘feltness of body’ explored in *Performing the Loop*. Marks suggests haptic images can suggest an over closeness and one where the viewer may be called upon to fill in gaps. This requires an embodied interaction which

draws on mimetic intelligence. Marks states for Merleau-Ponty, our relationship to the world is mimetic, “...one calls up the presence of the other materially” (p.138). This is “...an intimate way of being in the world, whereby the subject comes into being not through abstraction from the world but compassionate involvement in it” (2000, p.141).

Marks suggests:

The ideal relationship between viewer and image in haptic visuality is one of mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image, to lose her sense of proportion. When vision is like touch, the objects touch back may be like a caress, though may also be violent...Haptic visuality implies a tension between viewer and image, then, because this violent potential is always there. Haptic visuality implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing. (2000, p.185)

While embodied Marks reminds us that this is still not touch, and describes haptic images as often mournful, suggesting that though they might desire to touch “... all they can achieve is to become skinlike themselves” (p.192).



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

3.3 Still image

I view *Performing the Loop* as performative images out of activity. In this, they are most closely aligned with a film or video ‘still’. They are an intensified moment, through the condensing of the image, yet fall out of happenstance and from a larger whole, albeit through carefully edited selection. In this they imply a duration but one that cannot be fully obtained. They do their own work slightly dislocated, as parts of a larger possible whole. In this they are clearly set on their own doing, their own performance, which would not be possible if they were still embedded in the entirety of their making. And it is in this embodied incompleteness, within the spatial clearing and momentum of the chiasm that they ask something of the viewer.

The photograph, Jones (2006) states can be said to take its “... meaning through spatial distance, a gap...between the subject/viewer and the object/other ... (making) objectification possible” (p. 43). Jones (2006) suggests the photograph of the body can be engaged with:

...per Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodied experience ... (as)... a flesh like screen, one that presupposes the depth and materiality of the body as subject... This aspect of the photograph stems from our inextricable embeddedness in its visual field, which is simultaneously a corporeal field: as Merleau-Ponty notes, we cannot see (“possess the visible”) unless we are “possessed by it, unless (we are) ...*of it*” (p. 67)

Jones (2006) writing around performative imaging of body/self has been useful in understanding how *Performing the Loops* images of the body in activity are at work and located in use rather than ‘having been’.

The photographic ability to ‘wait’, as a ‘vacancy’ that can be returned to again and again (Sobchack, 1992) helps it remain in process, in its ‘part of’ the performance of the loop, at the same time it can “...flaunt the body itself as loss or lack” (Jones, 1998, p. 34 -35).

...the photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre.
Roland Barthes (as cited in Jones, 2006, p.39)



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Test*, 2010, still photograph.

Chapter Three

Artist's body and activity



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Test*, 2010, still photograph.

4.0 Labour of Body

In activity I use my body to ‘remove’⁹ my body. I am drawn, over and over, to enact a kind of ‘death’ as Barthes puts it of being ... neither subject nor object but a subject who feels (s)he is becoming an object’ (as cited in Jones, 2006, p.39).

This ‘removal’, this pull of separation, is continually and simultaneously a seeking to be resolved, and a ‘remaining in’, and in this acknowledges the un-edged and ‘incomplete’ body as

⁹ Rather than absence of ‘body’ interested here in body removing and reinstating spatially. This specific focus initially informed through Laura Tanners (2006), *Lost bodies: Inhabiting the borders of life and death*, exploring the physically felt loss of someone as absent presence, not absence alone.

I live it. My body labours¹⁰ to enact Merleau-Ponty's chiasm through the double touching within the subject object fold. I am compelled to repeat these activities of holding, joining, pulling, pushing, grasping and 'nearly releasing'¹¹, to return to their work, of one and another, of subject and object, again and again. This reflexive pressure is brought to bear through the embodied lens.

These activities are enacted in private in my working spaces, in silence and concentrated effort. It is important that I am 'in' the activity and that it is 'felt' reciprocally. Conviction, effort and understanding of activity's 'use'¹² are vital. I impose as little visual framing as possible. This helps my focus to remain in the activity as 'felt', rather than 'seen', an attitude of being 'in' the activity¹³ which is quite tentative to grasp and requires discipline staying within¹⁴. This could not be performed live for an audience as it is not the entirety of the activity that is of interest, rather the view of the embodied lens.

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Bruce Nauman, *Wall-Floor Positions*
1968; videotape, black and white, sound; 60 min.

¹⁰ See appendix for shifts in projects labour of body from things, sites, spaces to body/self

¹¹ Most often in enacting out an embodied looking, I ask myself the question, how can I hold on to you? (the lost body) which reflexively becomes, you are a part of me, I am a part of you.

¹² February show of project work titled 'and of no obvious use', see appendix

¹³ I distinguish here between an embodied being in activity and a more visual staging of activity.

¹⁴ In my attempts to 'redo' an activity, I have found all of the following conditions of the activities performance must be satisfied; embodied feltness, unstaged, as found, of use, and not visually prioritised

Bruce Nauman's focus on what is being *done* with and to the body, (Sharp,1970) and thinking about the body as sculptural material that can be manipulated and engaged with physically and spatially underpins much of *Performing the Loop*'s attitude in method. Nauman engages in activities that often involved physical and thought concentration, effort and duration, e.g.; bouncing balls, stomping, intersecting body and structures and spaces in some way. Performed privately, tooled and mediated through recording devices these activities are presented through documentation to perform for the audience

Nauman discusses his attitude in such activities in an interview with Willoughby Sharp (1970a):

If you really believe in what you're doing and do it as well as you can, then there will be a certain amount of tension- if you are honestly getting tired, ... there is a certain sympathetic response in someone who is watching you. It is a kind of body response, they feel that foot and that tension. (p. 148)

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Bruce Nauman, *Pinchneck*, 1968 Stills taken from 16mm film sequence, one minute 54 seconds

Viewing Nauman's *Neck Pinch* where Nauman physically manipulates and contorts his neck, my immediate response is a reflexive questioning, how do I know my? body? That Nauman is both simultaneously subject and object as he works himself, drives me to my own body/self, as embody his actions. The truncated head condense and exacerbate this conditioning that I perceive and feel as flesh. The pressure and force to the body in 'use' in *Neck Pinch* amplifies the felt embodiedness of the work. In *Performing the Loop* constriction and compression within activities where touch touching is extrapolated out to hold holding, mark the body; skin blanches

and reddens, body flesh distorts, melds together, or opens, giving a visible felt-ness of ‘touch’ of the body in use.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Tests*, 2010, still photographs.

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Pipilotti Rist, *Open My Glade (Flatten)*,
2000, video installation (video still)

Pipilotti Rist's, *Open my glade (Flatten)*(2000), depicts Rist's face continually being flattened and squished against the screen. Rist makes the body a screen and gives the screen a body (Jones, 2006) making the 'image screen flesh' and 'uncontainable' (p.223). In a similar work, Paul McCarthy's 1973 video work *Press*, Jones (2004) suggests such pressing of the body "explore(s) the thickness of the body ... its three dimensionality, its volume and mass, its fleshy-ness, its physical feltness at the same time it is imaged through 'representational structures'" (p.135).

By physically pushing and joining body into body¹⁵, as simultaneous object and subject, *Performing the Loop* explores past the visible limits of physical body, towards the immeasurable and uncontainable flesh into flesh, the lived body's continual reflexive dilemma, where do I end?



Myers, Ruth, *Test*, 2009, still photograph.

¹⁵ See appendix for examples of pressing into, against structures, objects, spaces and eventually body

4.1 Body and material, body is porous

Material allows for manipulation other to what the physical body; structures and surfaces may be able to perform. It also gives visibility to physical and conceptual processes. Material can provide a means to explore opening, erasing, altering of the body, as a way to pose in process, questions of self /other. This interest in the use of material for what it is *doing* rather than what it makes has framed and reinforced *Performing the Loop*'s focus on process rather than product.¹⁶

Clay is used here performatively. Used up against, with, and to my body, it is involved in active, intentional, 'in process' use. In this I find the clay works past and back to myself, it expands through its otherness, yet contracts through my authorship. This ambiguity underlying its purpose is particularly useful in enacting within the subject object fold. This positioning of material as an ambiguous but active partner in the work is an extension of my body/self in process, where it both complicates and colludes.



Myers, Ruth, *Tests*, 2009-2010, still photographs.

¹⁶ Through this stance this project has extended my sculptural practice beyond its focus on object making

4.2 Performativity, partial body and the sculptural act

Performing the Loop's focus on parts of body comes about through an interest in what the body is doing. But my aim here is that these parts are not disembodied, rather through flesh, they performatively call for and relinquish body.

This continual calling is brought about by as much as 'what is not, as what is' and relies on body/self experiencing as felt from 'within and without'. In this I am particularly interested in enacting an unstable removal and return of body rather than the clear absence of. *Performing the loop*'s performativity is a condition within a spatialness or situation, where the partial body caught up in process, draws upon the drive or operational qualities of the part object,¹⁷ stressing desire for an irresolvable and unobtainable completeness.

In *Performing the Loop* this plays out in method by sculpturally working my body 'doing' what I am stating; holding, joining, looking for, pushing against, within an embodied and spatially situating lens. From these 'do it' efforts or gestures, these remainder images remain, 'in process' performatively concerned with not with what they are, but what they do, not what they show, but what they seek.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop*,
Test. 2010, still
photograph

¹⁷ The terrain of the Part object, a term introduced by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, is extensive and complex. In this project I have been specifically focused on the performativity of partialness which has been informed by the Catalogue for Part Object Part Sculpture, an exhibition in October 2005 curated by Helen Molesworth, Wexner Centre for the arts in Columbus, Ohio.

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Alicia Frankovich.
Flying Fox, 2008

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Anne Hamilton, *Untitled*
(*body and object series*),
1984-1993

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Erwin Wurm
Outdoor sculpture Cahors, 1999

Alicia Frankovich's *Flying Fox*, (2008), Anne Hamilton's *Untitled (body and object series)*, (1984-1993) and Erwin Wurm's *Outdoor sculpture Cahors*, (1999) share *Performing the Loop's* interest in enacting the incoherence of the lived body.

These works engage the physical body in sculptural endeavours where the body is being acted upon in some way. Body here is material and tool, three dimensionally situated, and is labouring. Involved in the process of their specific activities these bodies generate a lack of completeness, drawing on the audience to seek an unobtainable resolution. In writing on Alicia Frankovich's *Flying Fox*, a one-hour performance of her leg protruding from an upstairs office window with the audience below, Christopher Braddock describes her leg as a part object, which, through its lack, "performatively draws out Frankovich's audience as they desire closure both in object and duration" (2009, pp. 1,2). Documented in a photograph the 'whole' of the body cannot ever be completely found.

These performing bodies explore their limits in ways that show the incoherence and the lack of representational fixivity of the lived-body. The lived-body is not able to be positioned wholly or completely as an object for viewing and knowing but rather as Merleau-Ponty's "expressive space", a continually negotiated encounter with the world. Anne Hamilton's 1984/1993 (body and object series) performs this encounter through body and material positioned in continual response to each other. Erwin Wurm performatively exposes this incoherence through enacting sculptural acts that intersect body/space/object in expressive gesture. While sharing these interests, *Performing the Loop* enacts a deeply reflexive positioning of *being* a lived body via the embodied lens. Providing a folding subject/object eye within my 'in process' embodied dilemma that is the lived body, body here is simultaneously subject and object, self and Other.



Myers, Ruth, *Loop, Test*. 2010, still photograph

4.0 Conclusion

Performing the Loop explores past the visible limits of body, towards the immeasurable and uncontainable flesh into flesh, exploring the lived-bodies reflexive dilemma, where do I end? Questioning the limits of the body *Performing the Loop* straddles sculptural interests of inhabiting physically, spatially and materially and Body Art's embrace of the incoherence and 'in process' continually negotiated body/self.

Focused specifically on the artist body in activity *Performing the Loop* emphasises process over product, performatively enacting encounters between body/self as simultaneous object and subject. *Performing the Loop* performs a continual holding and losing of body, as that which cannot ever be wholly reached or represented but rather felt within momentary chiasmic clearings.

Performing the Loop performs body as it cannot be got to. In this I have learnt that my body has no edges, or fixed containing hold on the world. Rather my body exists as Flesh, continually remaking itself. This is my body's labour. My vision and body tied together; from within and without, seeking responses that is my being in this world.

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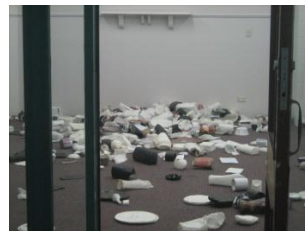
6.0 Studio Developments 2008-2010

March 2008



Using the lens to physically look for my mother suggested approaches in method. This activity demanded privacy, a physical looking between bodies, and prioritised 'use' and process, the embodied looking rather than the outcomes of. The lens here is a tool to be used performatively, and physically rather than visually prioritised. Implicating my body this activity challenged stance of being 'outside' of the work.

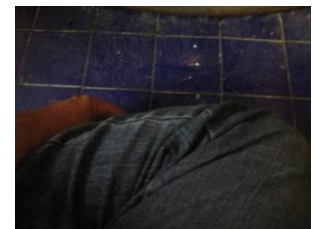
November 2008



*I went looking for you I thought you were in your mantelpiece, you were not.
I thought you were in those things over time you have placed there again and again, you were not.
I thought I could find there a physical connection to you. I looked and looked, where are you?
I cast these things that I had felt held you and over and over cut them open, just to be sure.
I tried to make them, to fill them with you; I put in your clothing, your words, your images
No, with a weighty responsibility I realized it was all in my hands
the meaning of these things Something/nothing. (Journal notes)*

Things /places stand in for bodies and are explored as not being able to be got to or made complete. Emphasising a performative 'do it', labour, particularly a physical looking for played out through making aim to locate the work as remaining in process and lacking resolve. Wanting this loop of continual deferral focuses a key aim but rather than objects as surrogates for the lost/looking for body I asked myself how can I involve my body in this questioning.

March 2009



Being kept out, I am here, but I can't get close. (Journal notes)

Bringing my body to the mantelpiece to explore embodied looking suggested the use of artist body in performative activity as a way to explore body as not able to be got to. This opened up thinking around materials, process, and questioning around what constitutes an outcome – what/how gets shown from such activity?



I put the clay on my hand as a tool to go looking but in the end the clay took over (Journal Notes)

Here looking took up an embodied being in the world. The pivotal experience of losing sense of the edge/perimeters of my body introduced key questioning; where does the body end? And how do we get to body? Over time this questioning steered project to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological notions of lived body, flesh and chiasm, and Amelia Jones writing on the use of artist body/self. This work focused method; the use of an embodied lens, performative use of material with/to body, and the artist body involved in reflexive activity as both subject and object, and suggested performative documentation as potential outcome.

April 2009



mantelpiece...move with me, around the room. Dropping clay (imprinted/squished) as I go... If memory is 'in' me...how does it 'leave' me? (Journal notes)

A response to shift in thinking about the edges of body/things/places as non containable, and therefore memory or any other felt connections being equally unlocatable. Here the mantelpiece felt to shift with me pushing project outwards from the mantelpiece location. Focus on activity as method and content.

May 2009



Exploring performative material-body reflexive relationship; clay balls in mouth to explore 'if you are in me?' end up acting like stoppers, pressed clay used to make structures porous.



Artist body involved as both subject –object with material performatively acting on. Here the clay pressed over by my other hand held me to the table, I couldn't move, a taking over in process. This type of 'acting on and to' activity eventually became a key approach to exploring subject-object fold.

June 2009



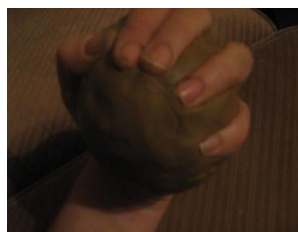
Sculptural activity frames reflexive relationship between material-body. Becoming more aware of the significance of lens placement as part of the subject -object loop. Activities not recorded in their entirety rather specific moments where I felt to be both subject and object.

July 09



Part objects, from bodily actions or gestures. Looking for and not finding. Inbetween gap

August-September 09





You can't be found, I can't make you-and that's the point (Journal notes)

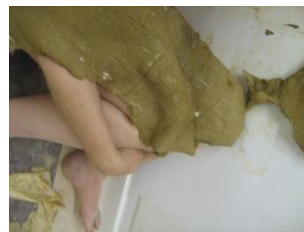
The part object and performative are utilised as what I am doing and making. Exploring how the performative 'do it' of making functions in both material residues and images raises questions of how I deal with my body in the work, as well as the significance of the works closeness too yet avoidance of 'actual' performance. I decide to be guided by the 'use' of the activity, and in this feel the need for more bodily involvement.

October – November 2009

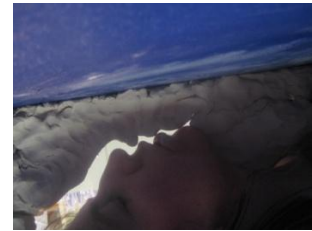




Body/space, Body/material. Clay lined latex mantelpiece mould to get behind/in



Filling the gap

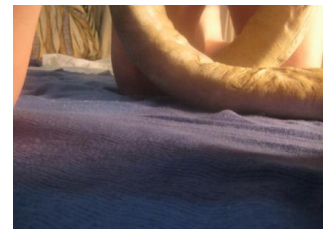
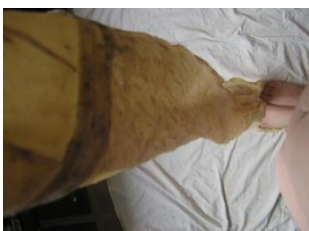
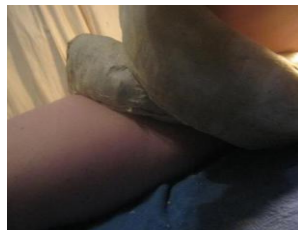


Clay, ambiguous relationship with body, material - material



Refocus on 'use' of activity, particularly exploring lost or not able to be got to body through reflexive body-material questioning. Exploring residues and material as props or more active performers, and questioning how these objects/images out of activity perform.

December 2009 – January 2010





Material acting on i.e. joining, embedding.



Physically manipulating images, desire to move/activate in some way. These became too object like. Performative documentation from body art practices suggested a rethinking about how images out of activity performed, that the images themselves did the work.

February 2010
...and of no obvious use, Exhibition, Temple Gallery, Dunedin



Installation of work included objects and images out of activity; photographs, wall of backed, cut out and filled photographs, table of clay/wax/plaster objects, floor objects. Exploring work-audience, opened up questioning around documentation, wanting performativity rather than residues. The exhibition consolidated that these reflexive body-material activities were central to approach but highlighted further questioning was required around how presented material from activities were expected to perform.

March 2010



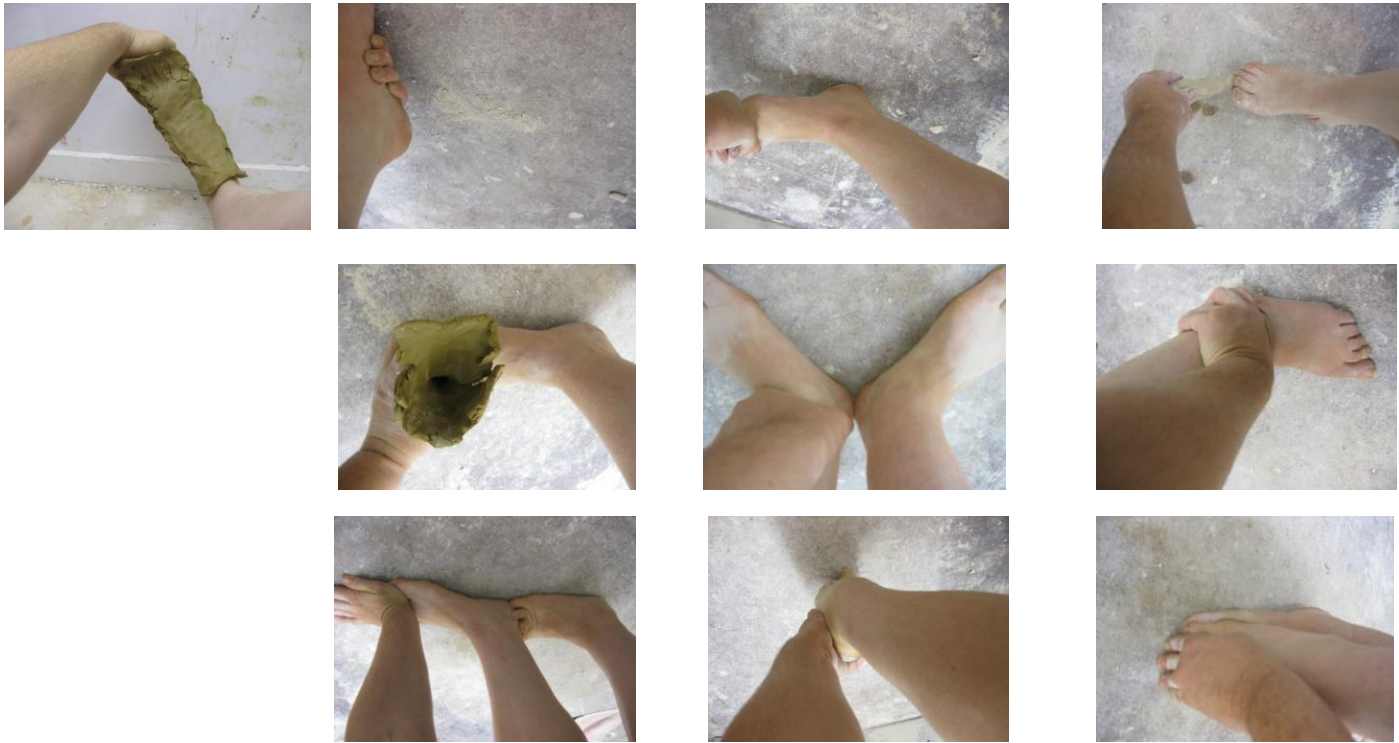
Refocus on body in activity but not as documented rather worked on/with. Body treated as tool, material, in process, being acted on and to i.e. body 'being lost' especially to other material/prop.

April 2010



Exploring limits of body and body having no edge, these activities use the lens 'looking on' introducing a visual framing which reduced the emphasis on doing for 'use', impacting on the performativity of the activity. I reflected back on hand/glove walking and decided to embody lens from this point. Questioning documentation from private activity decided it was not what it is, but what it does, and that it must be 'in use' rather than show or represent.

May 2010



Asking the questions how can I hold on to you (lost body) and how can I perform a body with no edge located the looking within my body (looking for / looked for) folded around the lens physically and spatially. These activities are not formal exercises, my position within them as both body and self is significant in relation to what I am doing. They explore lived body as not separate, definable, reachable, 'endable', through activity positioning body in process through both acting on and being acted on.

June 2010





Activities focused on looping and joining. Lens held up against body instigates folding of subject/object. Exploring movement and repetition that 'stays still' and is less and less rather than more and more, a returning gesture (part object) Exploring this drive playing out somewhat mechanically (detectable) whether in the images themselves, or in how brought to an audience, an 'over and over'. Documents concerned with doing rather than showing.

July -September2010
Performing the lens





Focus on performative documents that explore the phenomenological lived-body as a continually negotiated encounter with the world through artist's body, tooled via an embodied lens, in reflexive activity as both subject and object.

7.0 *Performing the Loop*

All 945 x 1120 mm







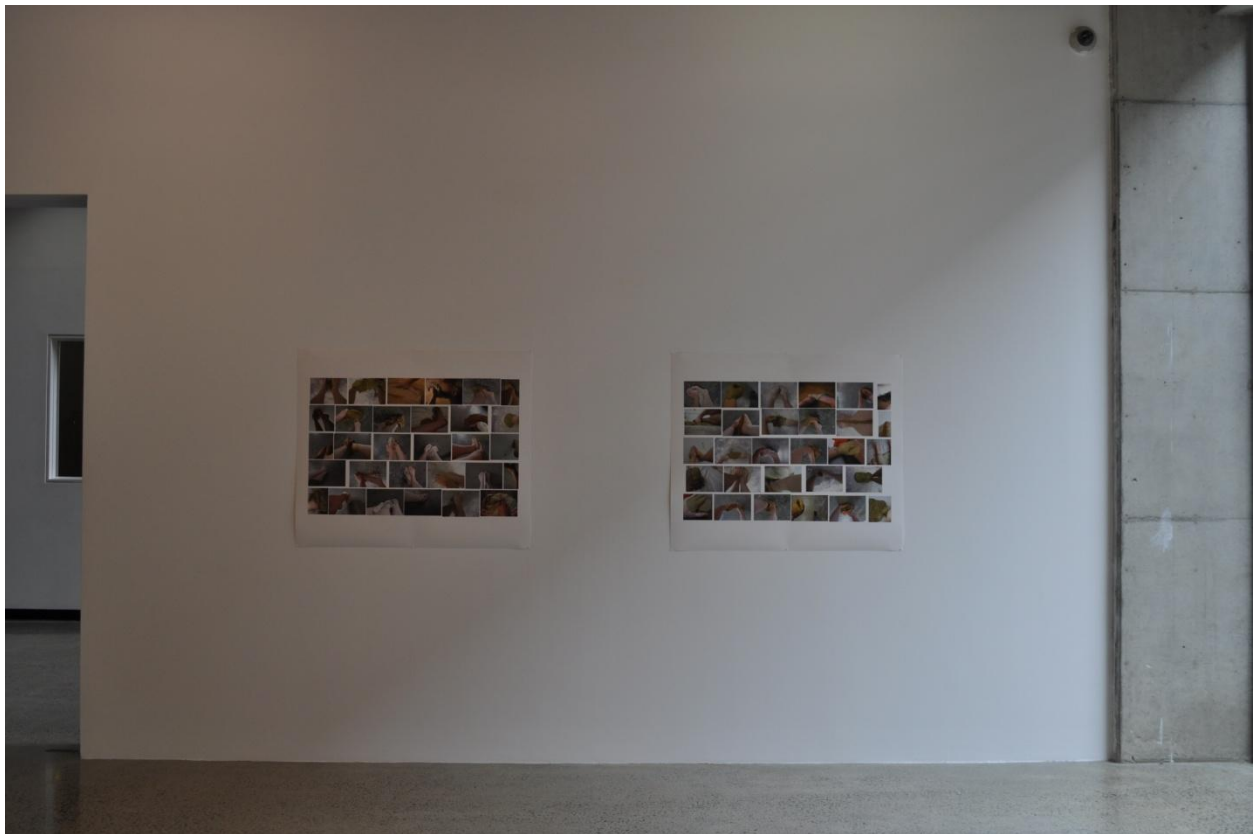


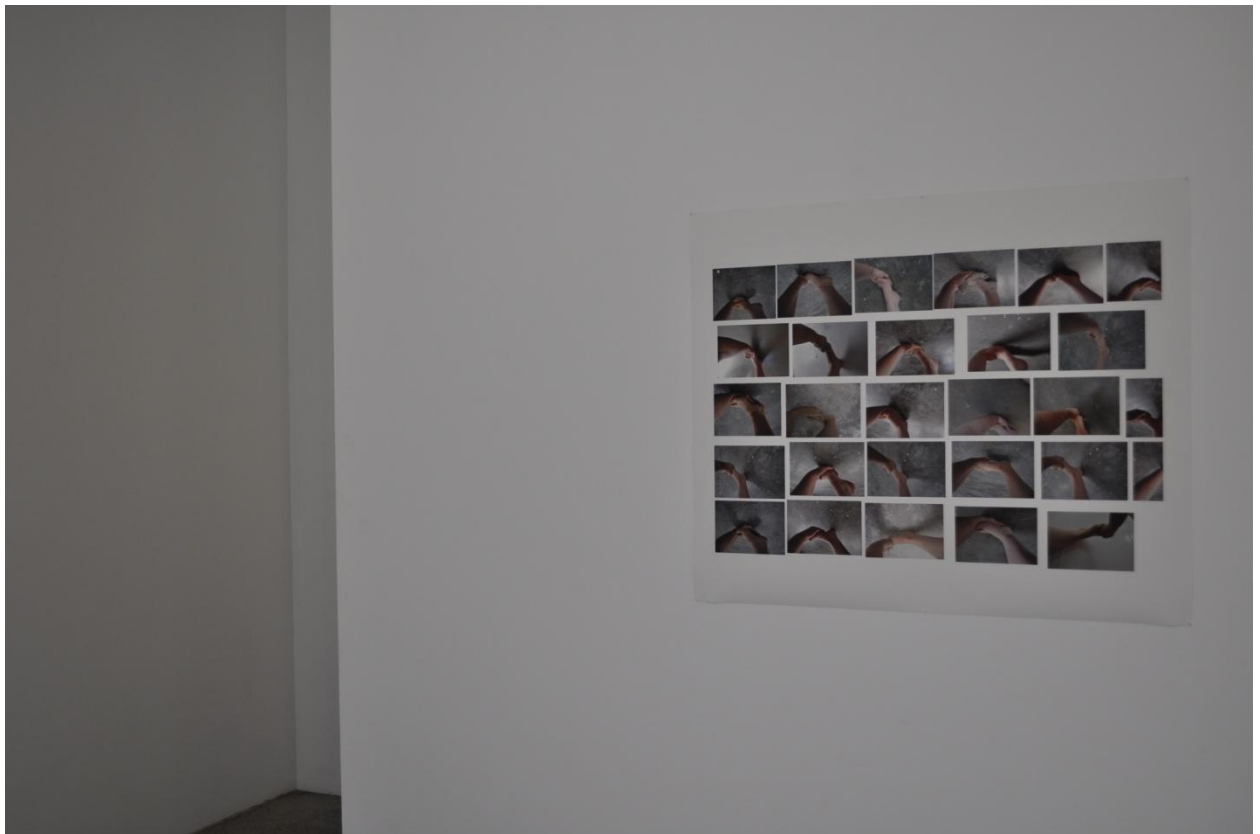


7.1 Installation views: *Performing the Loop*, St Paul St Gallery 2, Auckland, 2010









7.2 'Attempts' for *Performing the Loop*, St Paul St Gallery 2, Auckland, 2010

Attempts –

L-R

- 1 to join and separate body by clay between feet
- 2 to remove hand and feet ends by covering in clay
- 3 to make a continuous edge
- 4 to edge where standing
- 5 to hold hand with clay glove to the ground by left foot
- 6 to join left hand and foot into an ending, part of

- 1 to hold clay against wall between left hand and foot
- 2 to expand outwards from the space of body
- 3 to end feet
- 4 to mark edges and space of crossed feet
- 5 to hold right foot above the ground by left hand with clay
- 6 to enter floor by both feet, part of

- 1 to close body against itself by pressing hand against foot separated by clay
- 2 to force left foot into clay lined left hand
- 3 to hold onto clay by both left foot and right hand
- 4 to stand left foot on left hand holding lumped clay
- 5 to remove body by squeezing left hand and foot with clay between tightly
- 6 to make foot disappear into clay and the wall, part of

- 1 to remove hand by foot and foot by hand
- 2 to balance on clay with left hand and foot as they follow each other
- 3 to remove foot from body
- 4 to make body have no edge by joining left hand and feet as tightly as possible on top of each other
- 5 to make vertical plane between feet separate body
- 6 to pull left foot with left hand and left hand with left foot, part of

- 1 to end foot with clay
- 2 to pivot on clay ball by left hand and foot joined
- 3 to move feet on clay by left hand while standing still
- 4 to close body from one side and open it from the other
- 5 to hold foot on hand on clay from one point
- 6 to fill the spaces crossed over feet take up

Attempts –

L-R

- 1 to fill space between left hand and foot with clay and hold onto clay
- 2 to look with clay glove hand walking
- 3 to make clay opening with feet
- 4 to make clay ending with feet
- 5 to join and separate left hand and foot
- 6 to hold lumped clay under body, part of

- 1 to press right foot into clay lined latex mould with body on top
- 2 to press left hand and foot together while being filled by clay
- 3 to open clay with feet
- 4 to walk onto left hand clay glove by left foot
- 5 to separate body with clay
- 6 to almost cover body under clay lined latex mould, part of

- 1 to press right hand onto clay by left foot
- 2 to hold feet apart and joined by pressed clay
- 3 to hold and join left foot and left hand with clay
- 4 to squash left hand in glove to the ground by left foot
- 5 to hold left hand to the table by clay
- 6 to hold parts of body under clay lined latex mould, part of

- 1 to make an ending between lumped clay and body
- 2 to press standing feet into clay lump by right hand
- 3 to get inside clay lined latex mould
- 4 to make an opening
- 5 to hold feet still by clay block

- 1 to hold left hand middle fingers to table by clay moulded over by right hand
- 2 to join left hand and left foot by clay in loop
- 3 to stand into clay glove on left hand by left foot
- 4 to redo clay glove hand walking
- 5 to stand on ball of clay separated from the floor by left hand
- 6 to separate body and pressed clay

Attempts –

L-R

- 1 to separate and join feet by strip of clay
- 2 to hold left hand and right foot to floor by clay pressed over by right hand
- 3 to hold left hand into wall
- 4 to hold feet together by clay between big toes
- 5 to edge body by clay pressed to floor up against joined feet
- 6 to end hand and foot in ball of clay, part of

- 1 to hold left foot to wall by right hand separated by clay
- 2 to hold and be held by clay
- 3 to end left foot in clay
- 4 to hold left hand to wall by pressed clay
- 5 to open bottoms of feet with clay
- 6 to press fingers and clay, part of

- 1 to separate feet from floor with clay
- 2 to keep feet from moving outwards
- 3 to remove left hand from body
- 4 to press ends of feet and make into something else
- 5 to join feet to the ground
- 6 to end foot in clay lump, part of

- 1 to get left hand into pressed clay wall
- 2 to end and stop right foot
- 3 to join and separate feet
- 4 to join and separate left foot and left hand by clay
- 5 to stand and lean on clay

- 1 to edge inside space of facing feet
- 2 to seal left foot and hand around clay
- 3 to join body through clay joiner
- 4 to pivot body around clay held by left hand and foot
- 5 to be separated from ground by pressed clay

Attempts –

L-R

- 1 to stand with left foot on left hand
- 2 to pull left foot and left hand against each other
- 3 to hold and turn left foot by left hand
- 4 to press clay down by left foot and up by left hand
- 5 to pull left foot forward by left hand
- 6 to hold left foot up by left hand, part of

- 1 to pull left foot upwards by left hand
- 2 to pull left foot from wall by left hand
- 3 to press downwards by left foot and upwards by left hand
- 4 to put left foot into palm of left hand
- 5 to move with left foot held by left hand

- 1 to press left wrist downwards by left foot and left foot upwards by left hand
- 2 to stand with left foot on right foot curved into each other
- 3 to end left foot in left wrist
- 4 to hold left foot closely by left hand
- 5 to press left foot down and pull it up
- 6 to hold ball of left foot by left hand and pull it along

- 1 to pull left foot by left hand and left hand by left foot
- 2 to hold left foot by toes bent into left hand
- 3 to remove left foot by left hand and left hand by left foot
- 4 to hold and move ball of left foot just above the ground
- 5 to pull left foot and left hand around
- 6 to hold left foot to the floor by left hand, part of

- 1 to press left foot into left wrist until it hurts
- 2 to press left foot into left hand tipping backwards
- 3 to pull and hold onto left foot and left hand
- 4 to stand left foot completely on left hand and wrist
- 5 to pull left foot backwards by left hand

Attempts –

L-R

- 1 to join body by left hand holding right foot
- 2 to hold left foot to ground against clay while pulled upwards by left hand
- 3 to step into clay held by left hand with left foot
- 4 to hold left foot by left hand
- 5 to separate left hand from left foot by thinned clay
- 6 to end left hand and foot, part of

- 1 to join left hand and left foot backwards
- 2 to fill and join inside of hand and foot with clay
- 3 to remove ending by pressing left hand into left ankle
- 4 to lift left foot with left hand holding clay
- 5 to join left hand and left foot into clay on the wall
- 6 to press leg and hand together against the wall, part of

- 1 to press left foot into clay while left hand holds clay
- 2 to join right hand, right foot and clay into the wall
- 3 to press down by left hand while holding left foot above the ground
- 4 to hold and move clay by left hand and right foot
- 5 to pull left foot by clay held in left hand
- 6 to stand on left wrist by left foot, part of

- 1 to hold left foot against wall by left hand, part of
- 2 to join and separate body by clay held between inside of left foot and hand
- 3 to press and hold right foot and right hand with clay in between together and above the ground
- 4 to hold and press clay between left hand and foot
- 5 to make a hole with left hand, right foot and the ground
- 6 to cover left foot with left hand so it isn't there anymore, part of

- 1 to hold left foot on left wall, part of
- 2 to hold onto clay and turn body by right hand and foot
- 3 to stand into left wrist by left hand separated by folded clay
- 4 to join and curve body by left hand holding clay to right foot
- 5 to press down and join clay to ground by left hand and foot
- 6 to hold and move left foot on ground by turned left hand