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Humanity Undone, A practice led enquiry into self-injury

Abadie, Karen

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UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH

HUMANITY UNDONE,
A PRACTICE LED ENQUIRY INTO SELF-INJURY

by

KAREN ABADIE

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

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Karen Abadie

Humanity Undone: A Practice led Enquiry into Self-Injury

Abstract

This thesis enquires into my lived experience of self-injury (cutting my own skin), asking to what extent can moving image, sound and performance in the context of art installation reveal an understanding of the processes of self-injury. I employ an embodied onto-epistemological methodology that blends artistic enquiry with active engagement with phenomenological and new materialist feminist theory.

This investigation reveals a dynamic yet subtle relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as- subject, as initially described by Husserl as *Leib* and *Körper* (1990). I use 16mm film and performance in a haptic immersive installation environment to articulate these dynamic subtleties. Merleau-Ponty refers to this as 'double belongingness', whereby the lived body is 'a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them' (1968, p.137). My research articulates the importance of the subtle shifts from object to subject, and how they are reflected through the lived body, I discover and articulate the pain and distress of when this dynamic breaks.

My practice research expresses through visual and affective means, the subtleties of the corporeal relationship between subject and object, in ways that I propose philosophical, psychological and sociological texts fail to do. By integrating material feminism theory (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008), with a materialist practice of 16mm analogue film and installation art practice, I articulate the lived experience of body-as-object and body-as-subject and of the dynamic relationship which, I argue, exists

between them. Further, the materiality of 16mm analogue film enables me to articulate the ways in which female bodies are inscribed. As Kay Inckle writes, 'gender is played out upon the body which is already marked as Other – female – through the norms of femininity' (Inkle, 2007, p.92) which leads to an intensified process of self-objectification, further emphasising the 'sense of the self as object' (Inckle, 2007, p. 93). The embodied onto-epistemological methodology that I devised can be usefully employed by artists working with a embodied moving image installation practice. My research reveals new understandings of the relationship between body-as-object and body-as-subject that can be mapped onto current psychological models of dissociation and provides a critical framework for rethinking approaches to treatment of self-injury and broader mental health concerns.

List of Contents

List of Illustrations 15

Links to my research artworks 21

A note to the reader 24

The Film Prayer 25

The Body Prayer 25

INTRODUCTION 26

Personally situated context 26

Research questions and the role of artistic research practice 27

Theoretical context 32

Artistic context 40

New knowledge 42

Thesis structure 43

CHAPTER ONE:

Self-Injury – The historical, clinical and sociological context 49

1.1 Introduction 49

1.2 The historical context of self-injury 51

1.3 The clinical context of self-injury 57

1.4 The sociological context of self-injury 62

1.5 Conclusion 69

CHAPTER TWO:

Evolution of a research practice, theoretical framework,

research methodology and methods 73

2.1 Introduction 73

2.2 Situating the body in my research methodology 75

2.3 Building an embodied onto-epistemological methodology 81

2.4 Methods 87

2.5 Conclusion 99

CHAPTER THREE:

Installation practice and expanded cinema; artistic context 100

3.1 Installation practice and expanded cinema 100

3.2 Artistic context 103

3.3 Conclusion 117

CHAPTER FOUR:

Discovering the body through phenomenology 119

4.1 Introduction 119

4.2 Scratching below the surface 120

4.3 What lies beneath 141

4.4 Conclusion 156

CHAPTER FIVE: Blurring the binary 158

5.1 Introduction 158

5.2 …my beauty… 160

5.3 Pinch Point 179

5.4 Flesh[wound] 194

5.5 Conclusion 215

CONCLUSION 219

The thesis in summary 219

Contribution to knowledge 224

Future research 230

AFTERWORD 232

REFERENCES 236

BIBLIOGRAPHY 251

APPENDIX ONE: Subjectivity and affect: uncomfortable bedfellows,

published essay 253

List of Illustrations

Unless otherwise credited all photographs by the author.

Figure 1. *Möbius strip* [photograph by David Benbennick, n.d.] available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ File:M%C3%B6bius_strip.jpg> [Accessed: 17 February 2019]. (Accessed: 30 August, 2022) 38

Figure 2. *Categorisation of functions of NSSI,* from Taylor et al (2018) 59

Figure 3. *Aperture Sweep* [16mm Performance] Gill Eatherley*,* performed at BEEF, 2019 as part of *Destroying the image of the female, Low Light, February 2019*, available at: http://www.beefbristol.org/destroying-the-image-of-the-female-low-light-at-beef-feb-2019/ (Accessed 30 August 2022) 105

Figure 4. *Reel Time* [16mm Performance] Annabel Nicolson, 1972, available at http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel_nicolson/essay(1).html (Accessed 15 September 2017) 106

Figure 5. *Bore Song* [Installation] Louisa Fairclough, 2011, available at: http://louisafairclough.co.uk/archive/bore-song/ (accessed: 1st August, 2022) 108

Figure 6. *Bore Song* [Installation] Louisa Fairclough, 2011, (detail) available at: http://louisafairclough.co.uk/archive/bore-song/ (accessed: 1st August, 2022). 109

Figure 7. *Re-exposure* [animation/live action film] Vicky Smith, 2020, Stills of close-up skin, part of *Look at this skin…it keeps changing* [Exhibition]. Arnolfini, Bristol,

available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPbYpCfnRp4, (accessed: 1 August 2022). 112

Figure 8. *Re-exposure* [animation/live action film] Vicky Smith, 2020, Stills of looking at film on lightbox part of *Look at this skin…it keeps changing* [Exhibition]. Arnolfini, Bristol, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPbYpCfnRp4, (accessed: 1 August 2022). 113

Figure 9. *Removed* [16mm film] Naomi Uman, 1999, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUlMDdIAe-g (accessed: 13 August 2022).115

Figure 10. *Burn (Or, the Second Law of Thermodynamics)* [8mm film Performance], Bradley Eros, 2004, available at: https://microscopegallery.com/bradley-eros-art/, (accessed: 1 August, 2022) 117

Figure 11. Plan of *Scratching Below the Surface*, 2017 and 2018, [Performance Installation] 121

Figure 12. *Scratching Below the Surface* 2017, [Performance Installation] Performance detail, Room 2 124

Figure 13. *Scratching Below the Surface,* 2017, [Performance Installation] Scratches on film strip, Room 2 125

Figure 14. *Scratching Below the Surface*, 2017, [Performance Installation] Performance detail, Room 2 127

Figure 15. *Scratching Below the Surface, 2017,* [Performance Installation] Performance detail, Room 2, with kind permission from Zanna Markillie 128

Figure 16. *Scratching Below the Surface, 2017,* [Performance Installation] Performance detail with audience, Room 2, with kind permission from Zanna Markillie 129

Figure 17. *Scratching Below the Surface, 2017*, [Performance Installation] Performance detail with audience, Room 2, with kind permission from Zanna Markillie 130

Figure 18. *Scratching Below the Surface,* 2017, [Performance Installation] Re-splicing the film, Room 2, with kind permission from Zanna Markillie 130

Figure 19. *Scratching Below the Surface,* 2017, [Performance Installation] Rethreading the projector, Room 2, with kind permission from Zanna Markillie 131

Figure 20. *Scratching Below the Surface,* 2017, [Performance Installation] Video still, Room 3, with kind permission from Zanna Markillie 133

Figure 21. Plan of *What Lies Beneath,* 2018 [16mm Installation]..... 142

Figure 22. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Installation view 143

Figure 23. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, still of found footage showing detail of ink on screen 144

Figure 24. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Detail of found footage 144

Figure 25. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Detail of double projection 147

Figure 26. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Detail of double projection 148

Figure 27. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Detail of double projection 148

Figure 28. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Detail of looped film 149

Figure 29. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Installation detail 150

Figure 30. *What Lies Beneath,* 2018, [16mm Installation], Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Installation detail 150

Figure 31. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, Film Still 160

Figures 32, 33, 34 and 35. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, stills to 0:30:00 162

Figures 36, 37, 38 and 39. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, stills from 0:54:23 – 2:00:14 165

Figures 40, 41, 42 and 43. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, stills from 02:00:15 - 02:02:12 166

Figure 44. *Pinch Point,* 2019, [Performance Installation], Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, still of documentation of performance ... 180

Figures 45, 46, 47 and 48. *Pinch Point,* 2019, [Performance Installation], Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, stills of documentation of live performance, detail of progression of red marking 182

Figures 49, 50, 51 and 52. *Pinch Point,* 2019, [Performance Installation], Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, stills of documentation of live performance, detail of the cut of the screen 183

Figure 53. *Flesh[wound],* 2020, [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, looking to the left end of installation 195

Figure 54. *Flesh[wound],* 2020, [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, looking to the right end of installation 196

Figures 55, 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60. *Flesh[wound],* 2020, [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, stills of B/W film loop 197

Figures 61, 62, 63, 64, 65 and 66. *Flesh[wound],* 2020, [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, stills of colour film loop 199

Figure 67, 68 and 69. *Flesh[wound],* [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, Close up of central screens 200-201

Figure 70. *Flesh[wound],* [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, unexpected reflections on back walls of installation space 202

Links to my research artworks

(I also provide weblinks as each artwork is introduced)

Scratching below the surface **(2018)**

a three-roomed 16mm video, sound and performance installation on the three phases of self-injury in the context of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, revealing the connection with the theory of dissociation.

Link: https://vimeo.com/744320123

What lies beneath **(2018)**

a 16mm film and sound installation that uncovers the gendered foundations to my lived experience of self-injury.

Link: https://vimeo.com/744953089

These two artworks are analysed in Chapter Four.

***…my beauty…* (2019)**

a video and sound installation that employs digitally edited 16mm film to represent the moment of skin cutting through images of my body and the razor blade. This artwork examines the role of the skin as a boundary in the act of self-injury and consequently offers insights into the ways in which self-injury conveys a shift from the body-as-object to the body-as-subject.

Link: https://vimeo.com/744299163

Pinch Point (2019)

a 16mm performance installation that explores the moment of the cut, articulating the transition between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, giving audiences an embodied understanding of the body-as-subject.

Link: https://vimeo.com/744303192

Flesh[wound] (2020)

a 16mm immersive installation that further explores the dynamic embodied relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, exploring the ways that the body-as-object can communicate the psychological idea of dissociation.

Link: https://vimeo.com/558719311

These three artworks are analysed in Chapter Five.

A note to the reader

Due to the nature of this research project, I would like to reassure readers that no blood was drawn during the life of this project.

However, I do include extracts from my journal, written across the life of this research project. This is in red text and appear at the start of many sections throughout the thesis. A sensitive reader may wish to avoid reading these passages

The Film Prayer*

I am celluloid, not steel; O God of the machine, have mercy. I front dangers whenever I travel the whirring wheels of the mechanism. Over the sprocket wheels, held tight by the idlers. I am forced by the motor's might. If a careless hand misthreads me, I have no alternative but to go to my death. If the pull on the take-up reel is too violent, I am torn to shreds. If dirt collects in the aperture, my film of beauty is streaked and marred, and I must face my beholders - a thing ashamed and bespoiled. I travel many miles in tin cans. I am tossed on heavy trucks, sideways and upside down. See that I don't become bruised and wounded beyond the power to heal. I am a delicate ribbon of film - misuse me and I disappoint thousands; cherish me, and I delight and instruct the world.

Author unknown.

(Quoted in Paul Ivester, 2006)

*Found in a film can

The Body Prayer

I am flesh, blood, bones. I am not a vehicle to serve your mind, I am not a machine. I am an intelligence beyond your mind, including your mind. When you feel grief, I am calling you. When you feel heartache, joy, sadness, I am calling you, to your body. I am what makes you whole, what makes you feel safe, where you feel love, hate, where you feel passion so deep you feel it in your toes. I can include it all.

If you forget me, life feels flat, two dimensional, grey, but if you forget me, it is as though I don't exist. I become the vehicle to serve your mind. But remember me, feel your toes, that's all it takes. Give me your attention, just for a moment.

Come, to your body, to feel what life is like here, where all is included, where you can feel, not just your *own* body, but the presence of all other bodies here, seen and unseen.

I am calling you, to *here*.

Karen Abadie, 2022

INTRODUCTION

It was the middle of the night. I took a glass from my kitchen. A thin glass, one which I knew would break into thin shards…. In my teenage days, I used tiny test tubes that I stole by the dozen from the chemistry lab at my college…. I took the glass upstairs to my bedroom, with a newspaper, wrapped the paper around it and gently stood on it until I felt the glass cracking under my foot. I unfolded the paper and felt my way through the shards with my fingers until I found the very piece which I knew, from experience, would do the job. I sat on the edge of my bed. I could feel my heart pumping in my ears and somehow time was compressed, as if at 48 I was no different from myself at the age of 16, while I gently caressed the soft skin of the inside of my right arm. At the same time, I was aware that a part of me was witnessing this act with a sense of alarm; perhaps it was the 48-year-old adult who should have known better.

Journal entry, October 2016

Personally-situated context

In the summer of 2013, I found myself carrying out the practice, or perhaps the ritual, that is described above. The last time I had done this was more than 30 years ago. I kept this practice a secret, then and now. I cut in places where no one would see, and would go to great lengths to hide any marks. There is something, I suggest, that is difficult to accommodate in our thoughts about the act of cutting our own skin. It raises complex emotions and, in my experience, leads to a sense of alienation and separation from our families and communities. One of the key sociological texts on self-injury I reference in my thesis is *Making Sense of Self-harm: The Cultural Meaning and Social Context of Nonsuicidal Self-injury* by Peter Steggals, who writes of self-injury:

> It may be a familiar presence in our lives and culture but it is also one wrapped in an enigmatic, dark and troubling aura, a kind of haunting otherness that intrigues and disturbs us at the same time and which, unusually, holds the capacity to upset both professionals and public alike (2015, p. 2).

When I returned to cutting my skin as a grown woman, after 30 years, my response was shock and confusion. This was matched by the reaction of the people around me, therefore my actions resulted in a troubled and isolating experience. The quote above creates a poignant, yet accurate, representation of this experience in the wider context of my community, my family and my friends. At the same time, the act of cutting my skin provided comfort; I could feel a sense of relaxation entering my body, and the subsequent care needed to dress the wounds appeared as an act of self-love. This behaviour no longer made any sense to my adult self, but my body clearly experienced relief following the act of cutting. My lived experience reflects the words of Jane Kilby, who in her essay, 'Carved in skin: Bearing witness to self-harm', provides an early sociological perspective on self-injury: 'The cut-skin testimony of self-harm is a bloody means of seeking the affirmation of an existence denied by trauma. "I cut, therefore I am", as they articulate this very moment of coming back into embodied existence' (2001, p. 127). Consequently, throughout this confusing and disorientating paradox, I sought to understand these apparently self-destructive yet compelling actions, in the context of a wider culture that finds self-injury so hard to relate with. This led to this practice-research project, wherein I would gain understanding, raise awareness and reduce stigmatisation of self-injury by investigating my lived experience through the art practice of analogue film, sound and performance installation.

Research questions and the role of artistic research practice

This thesis examines my lived experience of self-injury by employing an embodied onto-epistemological methodology that blends artistic enquiry and active engagement

with phenomenology, embodiment theory and new materialist feminist theory in order to respond to the following research questions. I ask to what extent can moving image, sound and performance installation art practice generate an understanding of the processes of self-injury. Furthermore, I research the ways that art practice reveals new understandings of the lived experience of self-injury in the context of the philosophical theories of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject. My investigation illuminates a dynamic yet subtle relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as- subject, as initially described by Edmund Husserl as *Leib* and *Körper* (1990).[1] My research further examines, through art practice, the ways in which the philosophical theories of the body can be utilised to produce a greater understanding of the psychological theory of dissociation and the sociological theory of estrangement throughout the three phases of before, during and after self-injury.

As a multimedia artist, I employ video and analogue film practice in order to create installations that respond to personally-situated, and yet universal, themes expressed through lived experience. For example, these have included an exploration of themes of loss and grief through the video and sound installation called *Inner Wilderness* (2015) in a burnt-out church, and the installation *Behind Closed Doors* (2016), which reflects domestic violence installed in a private residence. I have drawn on these practices of working through lived experience to create immersive installations in order to develop the onto-epistemological methodology that I have employed for my artistic practice-research project, described in depth in Chapter two. I have explored

[1] Edmund Husserl wrote three volumes on *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. These are known as *Ideas I, Ideas II* and *Ideas III*. His theory of *Leib* and *Körper* was first written about in *Ideas II,* first drafted in 1912.

the different phases of self-injury through embodied autoethnographic and personally-situated research methods, which I also describe in detail in Chapter two.

As this research unfolded I developed the methods that I would work with to respond to my research questions. I chose not to join the many, mostly performance, artists since the 1960s who cut their own flesh in order articulate certain issues, usually as an act of resistance in some way. Artists such as Gina Pane, Catherine Opie, Ron Athey, Franco B, and more recently Nicola Hunter and Kira O-Reilly to name just a few. It has been reported that both Athey and Pane made performances in response to the self-hatred they felt because of different lived experiences. For example, Pawel Leszkovicz in his article, *'Female St Sebastien: Parallel lines in the radical lesbian art of Gina Pane and Catherine Opie'* (2010), states Pane 'externalised the self-hate that women living in a patriarchal culture are forced to internalise' (2010:9) and according the Gary Morris, Athey's work is driven by 'a sense of martyrdom and, arguably, a self-hate instilled on him from childhood' (Morris*,* 1999*)*. Therefore, one might argue, in accordance with this tradition of acting out their self-hatred on their bodies, following this route in my research would have been an appropriate decision. There are many reasons why I didn't. Whilst this wasn't the route that I intended going, the decision was also taken out of my hands as the university, as part of their prevention of harm and safeguarding policy, required me to write to The Doctoral College stating that I would not cut my own skin during the life of this research and outlining my current state of mental health along with the support that I had in place should this research trigger difficult feelings. However, my primary reasons that I decided not to go this route are described here. Historically, I used self-injury as a method for

relieving my own distress and this research intended to reveal understandings of this process in order to transcend this act that was a marker of distress rather than healing. By cutting my flesh as practice research, I believed it would represent a repetition of the cutting rather than moving through and beyond it. Additionally, as I began to talk about my research with peers I experienced a sense of internal shame in response their reactions of my admittance to researching the breaking of my own flesh. Mary Richards, in her article 'Ron Athey, A.I.D.S. and the Politics of Pain' (2003), refers to a sense of othering that has been evident with performance artists using their body in this way, she says,

> The forces of culturally determined positivity mean that the masochist, guilty of allowing or carrying out unnecessary acts of intentional self-harm, without culturally recoupable results, is likely to become marginalised as pathological (Richards, 2003)

Consequently, I decided to use analogue film for its transformative material qualities. These qualities allowed me to explore this transformative potential of revealing the understanding of this behaviour, and could articulate the transcendence beyond self-injury.

The project specifically utilises 16mm film, to articulate the body, both mine and that of the audience. The materiality of the film allows me to draw an equivalence with my own and the audience's corporeality, a subject which is explored in Chapters three and four. Working with 16mm technology has provided a lively and dynamic field within which to research self-injury, giving me insights into the underpinning process through both philosophical, psychological and sociological theories. I employ the materiality of analogue film – i.e. the photochemical properties of the film and the

mechanical properties of the projection of the film – in an expanded installation practice. I reference Kim Knowles's essay, 'Blood, sweat, and tears: Bodily inscriptions in contemporary experimental film' (2013), where she argues how the increasing awareness of analogue film's limited lifespan, both materially and culturally, has facilitated discussion through bodily metaphor. This is a fundamental concept to my research question, and therefore Knowles has been an important reference in my thesis. She is an academic and a writer in the area of expanded analogue film, and her recent publication, *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* (2020), has provided key insights across this research project. Using 16mm film, I create visual and auditory immersive installation environments that encourage the audience to enter an embodied experience by drawing attention to the ambiguities of the body as both subject and object, and the dynamic relationship between these modes of existence.

In this thesis, I offer detailed analyses on five artworks that comprised this research. Each artwork reveals important recognitions pertaining to both practice and theory, and in the context of the research questions, led to further investigation through art practice. The research itself has been an iterative and cyclical process, both within each artwork's generation and across the whole life of the practice, from artwork to artwork, each of which is examined in this thesis. *Scratching Below the Surface* (2018) and *What Lies Beneath* (2018) are analysed in Chapter three. …*my beauty…* (2019), *Pinch Point* (2019) and *Flesh[wound]* (2020) are analysed in Chapter four.

All the artwork made during the research project comprise 16mm installation practice, two of which are performance installation. The artwork is designed to be experienced 'live', however, comprehensive photographic and video documentation is provided for the reader. The photographic documentation is embedded within this thesis whilst the video is available for viewing in the links provided on pages 21 - 23 and are provided as each artwork is introduced.

Theoretical context

Self-injury

Self-injury, self-harm, deliberate self-harm and parasuicide are some of the terms used to describe the intentional cutting of one's own skin. When I first carried out this behaviour as a teenage girl, I didn't have a name for it, or at least I didn't know it had a name. But now, 30 years later, self-injury is better documented through historical, clinical and sociological lenses – examined further in Chapter One. Both Kilby and Steggals refer to the difficulty of bearing witness to the act of self-injury, and explain how this is reflected in the difficulty of naming the behaviour. In Kilby's words, 'struggles over the power to name the testimony of self-cut skin serve to reflect the incomprehension witnesses feel toward self-harm and the consequent possibilities of punitive censorship' (2001, p. 126). Steggals likewise describes the deeply paradoxical nature of self-injury in great depth, drawing out the sense of ambivalence that those practising self-injury experience. He describes self-injury as 'something physical yet psychological; a symptom of disorder, impulsiveness and addiction yet also a coping mechanism and therefore an agent of self-control' (2015, p. 2). The

result is that the naming of the act is biased towards the public or the clinician's interpretation of the act, rather than reflecting the perspective of those carrying it out. Self-harm and self-injury have become interchangeable; however, self-harm specifically refers to direct as well as indirect acts of harm, for example, smoking and alcohol use. In *The Language of Injury: Comprehending Self-Mutilation* (1997), Gloria Babiker and Lois Arnold define self-injury as 'an act which involves deliberately inflicting pain and/or injury to one's own body, but without suicidal intent' (1997, p. 2). In my research, I align with Kay Inckle, academic, researcher and author of *Writing on the Body? Thinking Through Gendered Embodiment and Marked Flesh* (2007), who mentions that she uses Babiker and Arnold's definition of self-injury and other forms of self-harm out of necessity (2007), even though she, like me, isn't comfortable with these expressions. Inkle doesn't elaborate further. I also use the term self-injury in my research project largely because, to me, it is the least judgmental of all the terms available. In Chapter One, I scope out self-injury through historical, clinical and sociological lenses in order to contextualise the problematic nature of the behaviour.

Corporeality and self-injury, revealing the ambiguity of the body

This research project situates itself at the centre of the ambiguity and apparent paradox of self-injury that Steggals refers to as 'part curse' and 'part cure' (2015, p.2-3). I do this by positioning my body at the centre of my research, through an onto-epistemological methodology, underpinned by a fundamentally corporeal enquiry. From the outset of the project, I became aware of the ambiguity of the role of the body. Sociologist Amy Chandler suggests in her book *Self-Injury, Medicine and*

Society: Authentic Bodies that there is an ambiguous relationship between the person self-injuring and their body (2016, pp. 27-31). We are actants and we cut, therefore we are the subject, but we cut our own skin, therefore we are also the object (Chandler, p. 28). In her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (2004), Elizabeth Grosz, the philosopher and feminist theorist, describes this corporeal ambiguity as follows:

> Thus [the body] is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects (1994, p. xi).

The philosopher, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, reflects on the turn to corporeality in recent years in *The Corporeal Turn: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (2009), whereby she argues that the humanities and human sciences have begun to turn their attention onto something that has not only long been taken for granted, but also misrepresented for centuries. She writes that 'through its Cartesian legacy, the body was consistently presented as mere material handmaiden of an all-powerful mind' (2009, p. 2). Both Grosz and Sheets-Johnstone study this corporeal turn with the intention of 'refiguring the body so that it moves from the periphery to the center of analysis, so that it can now be understood as the very "stuff" of subjectivity' (Grosz, 1994, p. ix). I draw on this 'refiguring' to put my subjective corporeal body in the centre of my research. Grosz denies that there is a separation between the '"real" material body' and its 'cultural and historical representations' (1994, p. x), and rather posits that 'part of their own "nature" is an organic and ontological "incompleteness" or lack of finality, an amenability to social completion, social ordering and organisation' (1994, p. xi). In this thesis I align with Grosz's definition of corporeality

as a dynamic combination of both the material and cultural and historical representations (1994, p. x).

My research addresses the tensions implicit in viewing the body-as-object or the body-as-subject, and the relationship between the two, elucidated through my lived experience of self-injury. I draw on Husserl's analysis of *Leib* and *Körper* along with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's development of this theory in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) in order to articulate these concepts through an embodied artistic practice in the context of self-injury.

To expand on the foundational ideas of objectified and experienced body, I refer to the sociologist Gesa Lindemann's essay, *The Body of Gender Difference* (1997), where she suggests that the objectified body refers to 'the body as a visible and concrete gestalt', as opposed to the experiencing body which 'conveys a sensory and practical reference to the environment' (1997, p. 80).[2] In *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, Grosz describes *gestalt* as 'a totalized, complete, external image – a *gestalt* – of the subject, the subject as seen from outside' (1990, p. 48). My understanding of the objectified body (or the body-as-object) was formed when I experienced it from the outside, that is, when I am judging it and perceiving it as separate to me. This contrasts with the experienced body (or the body-as-subject), which I am sensing or perceiving from an internal perspective.

[2] *Gestalt* is a German word which translates to *shape*, *form* or *figure*.

My thesis investigates the ways in which the psychological concept of dissociation relates to the philosophical ideas of the lived or experiencing body and the objectified body. The description of my experience of the objectified body in the journal excerpt at the beginning of this chapter pointed to a sense of dissociation from myself. Dissociation refers to the 'separation of mental and experiential contents that would normally be connected' (Howell, 2005, p. 18). When individuals dissociate, they may feel unreal, outside their body, or nothing (Klonsky, 2007, p. 229). Although dissociation has been widely researched, in Paul F. Dell and John A. O'Neil's opinion, 'the dissociation field is in need of some conceptual housekeeping' (2009, p. 20). This results in ambiguities in definitions and understandings of the concept. Steggals has a divergent view on dissociation. From a sociological perspective, Steggals expresses concern, along with writer Ethan Watters in *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (2011), that western culture is overidentified with the individual, which has led to the medicalisation of distress and the psychologisation of social issues (Watters, 2011; Steggals, 2015). Psychological concepts like dissociation, Steggals argues, become individualised labels that describe states outside of the wider context of culture. He redefines dissociation in this context, describing it as traumatic estrangement. Steggals suggests self-injury represents 'an idiomatic expression of disorder, distress and estrangement that makes up a powerful and increasingly significant part of our contemporary personal and cultural symbolism' (2015, p. 48). He calls for a wider analysis of self-injury beyond the individualist approach. When 'subjectively construed', Steggals writes,

> [self-injury] is intensely personal and private, but it is a privacy that results from a sense of estrangement and alienation from society at large; it is a

> bruised insular and silenced privacy that implicitly entails a social critique (2015, p. 66).

I expand further on self-injury in the context of historical, clinical and sociological texts in Chapter One. I argue, through my research enquiry, that the ambiguity of the body that this chapter illuminates has the potential to cause the stigma and corresponding problematic treatment of self-injury that occurs in our current clinical system.

Grosz's ideas on the body/mind relationship are crucial in supporting the synthesis of the philosophical concepts of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, along with the psychological concept of dissociation. Grosz likens the body/mind relationship with the Möbius strip, the inverted three-dimensional figure of eight (see figure 1).[3] She posits that the body and the mind are not two distinct substances, or two attributes of the same substance, but that there is in fact a strong relationship between the two in such a way that the mind becomes the body and vice versa, yet the point at which one becomes the other is hard to differentiate. As such, the Möbius strip shows 'the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another' (1994, p. xii). Grosz goes on to say that the Möbius strip also allows us to articulate the psychical interior and the corporeal exterior of the body. She references Merleau-Ponty in this context, writing that 'although the body is both object (for others) and a lived reality

[3] Grosz has taken the model of the Möbius strip from her reading of Lacan, although she uses it in a different context to him and for different purposes. Lacan uses the Möbius strip to support the development of his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977).

(for the subject), it is never simply object nor simply subject' (1994, p. 87). My thesis examines the porous nature of the transition from one state to the other, ultimately stressing that there is not a hard boundary between the two. I also investigate how to understand the relationship in the subjective body of interiority and exteriority, and how this, in turn, relates to the body/mind schema.

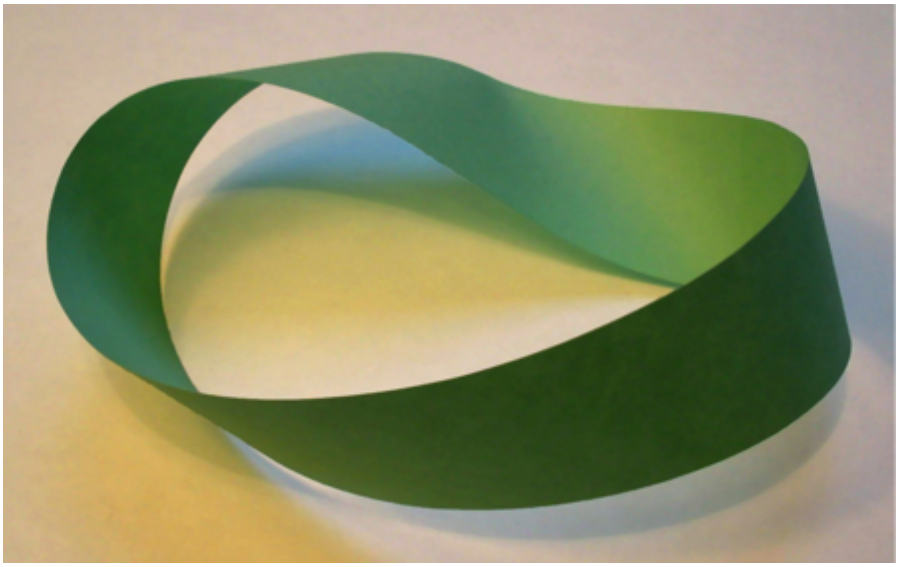


Figure 1: Möbius strip, photograph by David Benbennick. Image: © David Benbennick

Merleau-Ponty describes this relationship as 'double belongingness' (1968, p. 137). He defines the lived body as 'a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them', thus forcing us to give up any ambiguous distinction between them since 'each calls for the other' (1968, p. 137). Researching my lived experience of self-injury has revealed important understandings about this relationship, between what Husserl describes as *Leib*, the life subjectively lived or the body as subject, and *Körper*, the physical object of the body, and how they are integrated through the phenomenon of double sensation (Merleau-Ponty, (1968, p. 137), the actor and the acted upon (Chandler, 2016, p. 28). In relation to my lived experience of self-injury, this translate as the one who cuts and

the one who is cut. Merleau-Ponty reflects that these two aspects are never simultaneous, that the touching and the touched never completely coincide (1962, p. 408). The moment of tipping from the body-as-subject to the body-as-object is crucial in my research in that it exposes not only important moments in the act of self-injury, but also our understanding of embodiment and our self-reflection therein. The five art installations presented in this thesis articulate varying aspects of this tipping point; in the words of Merleau-Ponty, this touching and being touched 'at the same time takes away and holds at a distance, so that I touch myself only by escaping from myself' (1962, p. 408).

This thesis draws on the new materialist feminist ideas presented by Grosz (1994), Susan Hekman and Stacy Alaimo (2008). The substance or matter of my lived body is foregrounded and made equivalent with the materiality of analogue film. This reflects the stated concern of Alaimo and Hekman in their anthology, *Material Feminisms* (2008), to bring the materiality of the human body and of the natural world into the forefront of feminist theory and practice (2008). They argue that it is important to find a way to talk about the materiality of the female body, otherwise lived experience, corporeal practice and biological substance are excluded from discourse, which makes it difficult for 'feminism to engage with medicine or science in innovative, productive, or affirmative ways—the only path available is the well-worn path of critique' (2008, p. 4). This embodied and discursive exploration of materiality, both human and non-human, has led to important recognitions of the nature of embodiment and the dynamic between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject.

Furthermore, it allows audiences to navigate the research territory through the material experience of the artworks.

Artistic context

In my research, I have drawn on the work of other artists, largely those who work with analogue film, performance and installation with an embodied approach. I reflect critically on the works of Annabel Nicolson (*Reel Time*, 1973) and Gill Eatherley (*Aperture Sweep*, 1973), who were practising during the early days of the London Film Makers' Co-op (LFMC),[4] for their materialistic film practices and the way they use their bodies in performance in relation to 16mm projectors. Many other artists created work in similar ways, for example, Malcolm Le Grice and Guy Sherwin, but Nicolson and Eatherley utilise the machinery of the projectors in contrast to their embodied presence in the throw of the projector, thereby conveying notions of domestic labour set against the 'male' presence of the heavy machinery. These artists' practices enabled me to analyse and evaluation my artworks, *Scratching Below the Surface* (2018) and *What Lies Beneath* (2019), through a gendered lens and to situate my practice research in the context of both performance and analogue film.

I also explore the works of contemporary artists, Louisa Fairclough (*Bore Song*, 2011), Vicky Smith (*Re-exposure,* 2020) and Naomi Uman (*Removed,* 1999) in the

[4] Based on a model inspired by the New York and other international film co-ops, the LFMC was formed on 13 October 1966 and sought to provide exhibition, distribution facilities and a published journal to be called *Cinim* (Harding, 2005).

context of my photochemical film installation practice. Fairclough tends to make work in response to her lived experience, and in the case of *Bore Song* she employs analogue installation practice to articulate the lived experience of her grief from the suicide of her sister. She draws strongly on the materiality of the film, projectors and screen to express the sense of absence and presence this experience represented. Smith has worked extensively through 16mm film, live action, animation and performance. Her film, *Re-exposure,* explores the aging skin, the impact of the sun on the skin and makes reference to climate change, and employing both live action and animation. It includes close-up images of parts of Smith's skin that give the audience a stronger sense of her corporeality, whilst also reflecting on her and her mother's lived experiences. The work draws attention to the vulnerable role of the skin as a boundary in a similar way that both *…my beauty…* (2019) and *Pinch Point* (2019) do. Uman's use of found footage in *Removed*, in the context of pornographic films, presents an opportunity for examining my use of found footage, particularly of glamour films. Uman manipulated a small section of the film by removing all the images of women from the frames with nail varnish remover, leaving a clear indistinct blob on all the frames where women appear. Both Uman and I use footage from previous decades – hers from 1970s, and mine, which appears to be from 1950s. This raises important questions about the role of the male gaze in my research on the objectified body. Finally, I examine Bradley Eros's projection performance *Burn (Or, the Second Law of Thermodynamics)* (2004) which, like Uman's film *Removed,* uses found pornographic footage. *Burn* is an analogue performance where Eros pulls

a Super8 footage through a 16mm projector,[5] leading to a jerky and burnt projection. This artwork asks questions about the gendered binary that is clear in the performance, as the male performer 'pulls' the footage of a woman through the projector, and about the slow deterioration of the image of the woman in the film.

New knowledge

My thesis demonstrates, through visual and affective means, the subtleties of the corporeal relationship between subject and object in ways that philosophical, psychological and sociological texts fail to do. Revealing, and subsequently navigating through art practice, the different phases in my lived experience of self-injury illuminates important embodied attributes of the experience of dissociation, body objectification and experienced body. I argue that some dissociative states can also be described as objectified states, and my research examines this relationship in depth. Consequently, my artistic research affirms greater understanding of these states in the context of self-injury through art practice, while reducing the theoretical ambiguities. Furthermore, the use of an embodied onto-epistemological methodology, as devised in this project, uncovers methods which can be employed to articulate the corporeal body in artistic practice research.

[5] Super8 film is 8mm in width as opposed to 16mm. It was developed in 1965 by Eastman Kodak as an enhancement of 8mm. It has a larger frame size and smaller perforations at the edge. It is also housed in a casing or cartridge that simply slots into the camera, for making easy shooting, rather than loading the film into the camera manually.

Thesis structure

Throughout my thesis, I have included extracts of my journal. This is differentiated from the main text by a red font and included here in order to introduce my subjective voice that articulates my embodied experience of self-injury to the reader. I have chosen to use red to reflect the fleshy embodied tone of the research project.

Additionally, I analyse all the artworks through the lens of the relevant literature alongside the analyses of the artworks, this gives an integrated critically reflective insight into each artwork leading to my contribution to new knowledge.

Chapter One, 'Self-injury – The Historical, Clinical and Sociological Context', sets the scene for this research project by scoping the historical, clinical and sociological context of self-injury. I describe current clinical thinking on self-injury and the interpersonal and intrapersonal functions described by E. David Klonsky (2008), which I put into context with the sociological and historical writing that is relevant to my investigation. I analyse the need for phenomenological and embodied analyses of self-injury through both sociological – Chandler (2016), Steggals (2015), Patricia and Peter Adler (2011) – and psychological – Klonsky (2007, 2015), Matthew K. Nock (2009, 2014), Peter J. Taylor (2018) – studies. I conclude the first chapter by arguing that it is through embodied artistic language, in the form of art installation, that we can understand and go some way towards destigmatising the act of self-injury.

Chapter Two, 'Evolution of a Research Practice', describes the development of the methodology that has guided my research. This methodology is located in the

embodiment of my own corporeality, that of the audience and of the materiality of the practice. I draw on the writings of Laura Ellingson (2017), specifically *Embodiment in Qualitative Research*, and Mia Perry and Carmen Liliana Medina (2020), from their recently published anthology, *Methodologies of Embodiment: Inscribing Bodies in Qualitative Research.* In the second chapter, I make a case for subjectively situated research, following Hélène Cixous[6] who asks, '"who am I?" I ask myself "who are I?" (qui sont-je?)', in recognition that, as individuals, we also reflect others through our similarity. She further argues that 'there is no true art which does not take as its source of root the universal regions of subjectivity' (in Sellers, 1974, p. xvii). By directly embedding personal lived experience, Cixous says, subjective research has significant relevance for wider culture and society (in Sellers, 1974, p. xvii). It demonstrates the need for autoethnographic methods in this research. Unfolding from my own subjective experience came a method of writing that, in turn, led to the development of an onto-epistemological methodology, drawing on feminist phenomenology and material feminisms. The latter has led to the adoption of a materialist experimental film practice that lay the foundations for an evolving research practice to emerge. A corporeal understanding of my lived experience of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject has led directly to a photochemical material film and installation practice, cycling back again through my lived body to the emergence of corresponding theory. My lived body became the material turn between theory and practice as this research project developed.

[6] Hélène Cixous wrote the Preface to *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, edited by Sellers (1974).

Chapter Three, ‘Installation Practice and Expanded Cinema: Artistic Context’, positions my practice research in the context of the installation practice and expanded cinema. I also critically reflect on a selection of other artists’ practice with which my own practice has some resonance. I discuss Nicholson’s *Reel Time* (1971) and Eatherley’s *Aperture Sweep* (1973), followed by Fairclough’s *Bore Song* (2011), Smith’s *Re-exposure* (2021) and finally Uman’s *Removed* (1999). Analysing these artworks enables me to position the practice research, presented in the following chapters, within a lexicon of art practice.

In Chapter Four, ‘Discovering the Body Through Phenomenology’, through practice and theoretical engagement, I illuminate and challenge the relationship between phenomenological ideas of the experienced body and psychological theories of dissociation. My lived experience of self-injury reveals three distinct phases that I articulate in the performance installation, *Scratching Below the Surface* (2018). Each phase points to a different embodied, phenomenological state which the artwork expresses through sound, material analogue and digital film and performance. It is at this stage of the research where I have been able to articulate the notions of the lived body / experienced body (or *Leib*, after Husserl), and the objectified body (or *Körper*, again after Husserl). Furthermore, the art practice research points clearly to the moment at which it is possible to transition from one state to another through the act of cutting my own skin, and it is at this very point that the mapping of the theories of dissociation and experienced/objectified body becomes possible.

Having uncovered the distinct three phases of self-injury according to my lived experience, I then turn to the female body in order to elicit an understanding of the underlying causes of the action of cutting. *What Lies* Beneath (2018) is a sound analogue film installation that uses found footage and a 16mm film of my own body. I examine the ways in which the materiality of the installation, set against the ephemeral quality of the images, work together to communicate the causes and functions of self-injury, including the phenomenological stages of objectified and experienced bodies, whilst also introducing a crucial feminist embodiment lens into the research. I explain, through *What Lies Beneath,* the idea that women are deeply objectified in their bodies, as bodies, and how men have bodies that they can transcend, but a woman is her gendered body. As Inckle maintains, 'gender is played out upon the body which is already marked as Other – female – through the norms of femininity' (2007, p. 92), thus rendering the body a trap, an enemy or an alien being. The fourth chapter builds on feminist embodiment and the new materialist turn through an analysis of the materiality in the installation space in relation to the audience's experience, hence exploring notions of affect in installation practice.

In Chapter Five, 'Blurring the Binary', I provide a study of the three final artworks of this research project: *Pinch Point* (2019), *…my beauty…* (2019) and *Flesh[wound]* (2019 and 2020). First, through an analysis of the 16mm and digitally edited film *…my beauty…* (2019), I examine the role of the object and the violence inflicted on the skin. I analyse this artwork in the context of the dissociative mind, and how the tension builds and leads to the act of cutting, consequently resulting in a sense of relief, of pause and of the breath of the body. The role of the skin is paramount in this

work, and I draw on the writing of French philosopher and psychoanalyst, Didier Anzieu who developed the psychoanalytical concept of the *peaumoi* or the skin-self in his book, *Le Moi-Peau* or in English, *The Skin Ego* (2016). He expresses the idea that the skin is a border between self and not-self, as the point of location of the self (2016). I explore whether this breaking of the skin reflects the need to cut into the border of the self. The materiality of photochemical film is significant in my research, where I use the flaws in the surface of the film to create an equivalence with the skin. Next, I hone in to the moment at which I chose to act on my own skin, through an analysis of the performance piece, *Pinch Point* (2019). My research has revealed the important presence of this 'pinch point', a moment that reveals the point at which I shift from being an objectified, dissociated body to a fully embodied woman, through the perceived violence of cutting my own skin. During the enquiry, I explore this moment as a slowed-down, second-by-second encounter with my own body, the chosen object of 'harm', the flesh, the surface of the body as skin, and the latter's role as a boundary between outside and inside, between object and subject. *Pinch Point* articulates my slowed-down experience, as the subjective researcher, of the moment of cutting, at which point I anticipate questions on factors such as shame, the pivotal swing of annihilation versus survival, and the role of blood in self injury, along with an enquiry into the performative aspect of self-injury and self-injury as performance. I describe the revelation of the softness and vulnerability of the experienced body through the broken skin, represented by self-injury.

Finally, I draw together the threads of theory and practice through an embodied analogue film installation, *Flesh[wound]*. This installation gives the audience an

experience of both the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, and of the transitional space between the two. This space is the pause, the cut, the breath before the cut and after the cut, where thoughts no longer make sense, where thoughts scramble, the moment of holding the tool, the pre- and the post-, of watching and waiting and feeling a sense of both horror and excitement, of possibility and hopelessness. This is the moment of the body hanging in the balance. The place where Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'double-belongingness' suddenly makes sense.

In the concluding chapter, I evaluate the project outcomes in response to the research questions. I discuss what the research has revealed about self-injury, in terms of the phases involved, the underlying reasons for self-injury in the context of gender, and the relationship between self-injury, body-as-object and body-as-subject and dissociation. I further discuss the ways analogue installation art practice in the context of an embodied onto-epistemological methodology can be employed to reveal other mental health concerns amongst other embodiment issues. I also present the new avenues for further research that have emerged out of my research project.

CHAPTER ONE

Self-Injury – The Historical, Clinical and Sociological Context

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise self-injury. I review and summarise the research and analyses that has taken place since the 1990s up to the present day. I examine how early historical texts on self-injury, particularly Armando Favazza's *Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry* (1996), have led to unhelpful and over-individualised views of the subject, resulting in stigmatised and isolationist approaches to resolving the behaviour through clinical treatment. I define the term self-injury, and further explore the various approaches to analysing self-injury through various clinical and psychological lenses, with a focus on the functional approach, culminating in a critique of what I see as a bias towards an individualist approach to the behaviour and its treatment. I then move on to an exploration of self-injury through a sociological lens, focusing mainly, but not exclusively, on the writings of Peter Steggals (2015), Amy Chandler (2015) and Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (2011). This approach, which includes a corporeal aspect, provides a breadth and depth of analysis, but also, crucially, goes beyond the individual and extends to the familial, societal and cultural exploration of self-injury. In *Making Sense of Self-harm: The Cultural Meaning and Social Context of Nonsuicidal Self-injury* (2015), Steggals examines self-injury through a sociological lens, thus challenging traditional clinical attitudes to self-injury, while creating a useful three-axis model for understanding different approaches to the topic, in terms of cause,

function and treatment. These axes are: the ontological (responds to questions relating to the identity of the person who self-injures); the aetiological (responds to questions in the context of what the person who self-injures has been through in their life); and pathological (responds to questions relating to what it is like to be a person who self-injures) (2015, pp. 14-16). This is a useful scaffold within which to develop my enquiry, and includes helpful comparisons with clinical research while expanding into much broader contexts. I conclude this chapter with a strong case for an embodied enquiry into self-injury, drawing on Chandler's *Self-Injury, Medicine and Society: Authentic Bodies* (2015).

Underpinning my analysis is Steggals's claim that 'there is something inherently and characteristically liminal about self-harm, something that crosses and unsettles boundaries, confuses common assumptions and refuses to be hemmed in or pinned down' (2015, p. 2). He considers this a contributing factor to the lack of clinical and scientific analyses of self-harm, and how instead the behaviour is met with 'exasperation and bafflement' (2015, p. 2). Perhaps, as Jane Kilby writes, '[i]t would seem that the act of harming one's own skin by cutting it up speaks with a "voice" so sheer that it is virtually impossible for anyone to bear witness to it' (Kilby, 2001, p. 124). This reflects my lived experience of cutting my own skin, where people around me who discovered what I had done reacted with what seemed like horror, followed immediately by changing the subject. They appeared to find it extremely difficult to know that this was something that I was doing. Therefore, it can be argued that the 'liminality' and 'impossibility in bearing witness to' that both Steggals and Kilby refer

to create a bias in the attitudes towards and the treatment of self-injury. I address this bias through an exploration of all three areas.

1.2 The historical context of self-injury

A historical and cultural examination of self-injury reveals a very different story to the one we hear today, whereby the act is described as self-healing, self-purging and cleansing. Favazza's book, first published in 1987, presented important reflections on the nature of what he described as self-mutilation, in the context of mental illness and drawing on historical references to self-healing, purging and cleansing. He also drew new parallels with culturally sanctioned practices such as body piercing and tattoos. While the book was seen as a groundbreaking text for its time, according to Steggals there was an unfortunate fallout after the publication, since it negatively impacted the narrative and corresponding treatment of self-injury. Favazza views self-harm through contradictory lenses, either seeing it as 'deviant or pathological […] [as] just a culturally local expression of a more basic impulse to self-mutilate' or taking a reductionist, singularly medical and objectivist approach (Steggals, 2015, p. 25). That said, *Bodies Under Siege* does provide an interesting and in-depth foundation to any historical study. More recently, Sarah Chaney has published *Psyche on the Skin: A History of Self-Harm* (2017), where she refers to the 'pre-history' of self-harm, describing its occurrence prior to it entering a psychiatric context in the late 19th century. In contrast to Favazza, she questions the notion that self-mutilation 'can be thought of as a constant, universal human behaviour with a particular set of meanings' (2017, p. 12).

Favazza refers to self-injury as self-mutilation, emphasising that it has deeply embedded roots. For example, he describes a case of self-harm cited in the Bible in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus is presented with a disturbed man with an unclean spirit living in a cemetery in the land of Gadarenes. 'No one could bind him, not even with chains... and always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones' (Favazza, 1996, p. xi). Jesus diagnoses demon possession and performs an exorcism. The spirit leaves the man and enters a herd of swine that immediately drown themselves in the river. Favazza wonders what it was that stopped the man from committing suicide and proposes that perhaps what saved him was the repeated cutting of his own body with stones. He subsequently claims that some forms of self-injury 'represent an attempt at self-healing' (Favazza, 1996, p. xi), thus situating self-injury in a tradition of healing that spans history and cultures (Farber, 2004, p. xxxii). Indeed, in many cultures self-mutilation is carried out because communities believe that it serves a higher purpose or one for the greater good of the community (Favazza, 1996, pp. xi-xii). For instance, in Ivory Coast on the eve of New Year, some members of the Abidji tribe, guided by beneficent spirits that have 'possessed their bodies', sink knives into their abdomens, the resulting wounds of which are cleansed, treated and eventually healed. Apparently, the Abidji cannot explain the actual reason for this ritual, but it is likely that it is a physical demonstration of the social healing that has occurred for the whole community (Favazza, 1996, p. 22).

Historically, in Western societies, there are numerous examples of bloodletting, purging and other such activities.[7] Up until the nineteenth century, physical and mental ailments were regularly treated by exorcising something evil – often a demon, toxic substance or spirit – from the individual (Favazza, 1996, pp. 5-21). The four humours or temperaments of sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic and choleric were the basis of medical diagnosis, and when they tipped out of balance the patient was treated by bloodletting, blistering or purging. These treatments were believed to expel the body of demons that were thought to dwell within a sick person (Farber, 2004). Chaney suggests that these medicalised bloodletting practices can be directly linked with self-inflicted injury and that, as such, Victorian doctors and patients viewed self-cutting as a form of self-treatment (2017, p. 13). Nevertheless, Chaney goes on to state that the notion of self-harm as a 'specific category of abnormal individual behaviour' (2017, p. 13), defined as self-mutilation, emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Self-harm was not described as a recognised category of disorder until American Freudian psychoanalyst Karl Menninger published *Man Against Himself* in 1938, in which he described self-mutilation 'as an unconscious mechanism for avoiding suicide, by the concentration of a "suicidal impulse" on one part of the body as a substitute for the whole' (Menninger, cited in Chaney, 2017, p. 15). According to Chaney, in the 1960s, psychiatrists began to focus on cutting or scratching the skin more specifically as a method of self-injury, describing it as 'delicate self-cutting'

[7] In this context, I refer to purging as the action of vomiting for purification or cleansing purposes, often self-inflicted, or induced by a medical or spiritual practitioner.

(2017, p. 15). Steggals, meanwhile, reflects on the increased prevalence of self-injury since the 1990s. Adler and Adler question whether the occurrence of self-injury has increased or whether it has always been with us, but that there is simply a greater awareness of it, with greater depictions in books, films and other media (2011, p. 15). Examples include films such as *Girl, Interrupted (*1990), *In My Skin* (2002) and *Little Birds* (2011), and books such as *Blood Letting: A Memoir of Secrets, Self-Harm and Survival* by Victoria Leatham (2006) and *Scars* by Cheryl Rainfield (2010). Although awareness has increased, treatment has been reported to make those who self-injure feel worse rather than better, as a result of mental health professionals' largely uninformed, misinformed or judgemental attitudes towards the behaviour (Adler and Adler, 2011, p.3). As Adler and Adler confirm, self-injury tends to be a covert, even secret act, with many not seeking medical help, therefore resulting in a sense of isolation and powerlessness on the part of the person who is self-injuring. Adler and Adler claim that it is only in the early twenty-first century that persons who self-injure have begun to find a community (2011, p. 17).

Self-injury as rite of passage or ritual

As explained so far, many acts of self-mutilation appear to be associated with rites of passage. According to Ronald L. Grimes in his book, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, '[t]he notion of a rite of passage depends on three key ideas: the human life course, the phases of passage, and the experience of ritual transformation' (2000, p. 6). Ritual is a broader concept than rite of passage, but the latter does contain ritual. Grimes describes ritual as follows:

> [R]itual, like art, is a child of imagination, but the ritual imagination requires an invention, a constantly renewed structure, on the basis of which a bodily and communal enactment is possible (2000, p. 4).

My practice research reveals a ritualistic aspect to self-injury, evident in my performative writing, which I present in detail in Chapter Two, and in *Scratching Below the Surface* (2017), which I analyse in Chapter Four. Grimes refers to Arnold van Gennep who suggests spatial equivalences in his book *The rites of passage* (2000, pp. 20-21). I draw on the writings of both Grimes and van Gennep as they offer a pertinent doorway into the territory of self-harm. Van Gennep describes rites of passage as 'a domestic threshold, or a frontier between two nations', whereby we are 'neither here nor there' but rather 'betwixt and between' (van Gennep, cited in Grimes, 2000, p. 6), in a kind of no man's land through which we must pass in order to make the crucial transformation. It is important to note, however, that passing through this threshold holds danger and risk, as does the act of self-injury. Furthermore, as Grimes says, 'to enact any kind of rite is to *per*form, but to enact a rite of passage is also to *trans*form' (2000, p. 7). I am not, however, aligning self-injury with rites of passage, because as Grimes says, 'a rite of passage is more than a mere moment in which participants get carried away emotionally, only to be returned to their original condition afterward' (2000, p. 7). Whilst the act of self-injury does create a shift in state, in my lived experience this shift isn't permanent. Theresa McShane writes about self-injury in the context of ritual in her book *Blades, Blood and Bandages: The Experiences of People Who Self-injure* (2012). She describes the ritual associated with self-injury as a solitary one, carried out in private, the ritualisation of which develops over time in order to exert control over the behaviour

and to maximise the self-injuring experience (McShane, 2012, p. 73). I develop this analysis further in Chapter Four.

Naming the behaviour of self-injury

As is evident in this brief background to self-injury, the language used to refer to self-injury has varied over time and, even now, there are different terms used. Self-harm and self-injury tend to be interchangeable. The language of self-injury and self-harm, and the words associated with it, such as self-injurer or self-harmer, stigmatise the person engaging in the behaviour. As Stephen Lewis writes:

> From a humanistic standpoint, these referents may perpetuate unhelpful discourses and exacerbate the stigma that many individuals already experience by labelling and ostensibly equating them with the behaviour enacted (Lewis, 2017).

Penelope Haskin, Stephen P. Lewis and Mark E. Boyes maintain that the language surrounding self-injury has negative implications for the people who self-injure, asking instead for 'an open understanding of [self-injury] from the vantage point of people with lived experience, and avoid[ing] unnecessarily simplifying and pathologizing the behaviour' (2019, p. 150). From a personal perspective, I have always felt uncomfortable admitting to having carried out *self-harm* or *self-injury*, and I feel that both labels are laden with stigma – Haskin, Lewis and Boyes describe this as 'value laden framing' (2019, p. 150). I feel much more comfortable saying that 'I have cut my own skin', as there is no value judgement attached to this statement. However, for the purposes of this research project, I have decided to use the term *self-injury* as, for me, it carries less weight towards a sense of blaming the individual who is cutting their own skin, and therefore it has less charge behind it. Injury is more

of a description than a criticism. I define self-harm and self-injury in more depth below.

1.3 The clinical context of self-injury

Defining self-injury

In her book, *Hidden Self-Harm: Narratives from Psychotherapy* (2002), Maggie Turp provides a comprehensive definition that reflects the diverse nature of self-injury and explores the subject in the context of the wider definition of self-harm. She describes self-harm as an umbrella term for behaviour, firstly, that results, whether by commission or omission, in avoidable physical harm to self, and, secondly, that breaches the limits of acceptable behaviour, which applies to the place and time of enactment, and hence elicits a strong emotional response (Turp, 2002, p. 36).

With this definition in mind, nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) or deliberate self-injury can be described as 'the intentional and direct injuring of one's body tissue without suicidal intent' (Herpertz, 1995, p. 57; Muehlenkamp, 2005, pp. 324-325, quoted in Klonsky, 2007, p. 227). The International Society for the Study of Self-Injury (ISSS) takes this definition further and describes self-injury as 'the deliberate, self-inflicted damage of body tissue without suicidal intent and for purposes not socially or culturally sanctioned' (2018). The ISSS stresses the following important elements in its definition:

- Self-injury is 'an intentional or expected consequence of the behaviour' (2018).

- Self-injury 'usually results in some sort of *physical injury*' (2018, emphasis in original) such as cuts, bruises and marks on the skin, etc.
- Self-injury is 'separate from suicidal thoughts or behaviours in which individuals want to end their lives' (2018).
- And finally, '[b]ehaviours that might cause physical damage but are acceptable in our society, or part of a recognized cultural, spiritual or religious ritual, are not considered self-injury' (2018).

A functional approach to self-injury

In this section, I provide a summary of the key models provided by clinical researchers in the field of NSSI since 2000. It is widely agreed that NSSI is not specific to one disorder, but occurs across disorders (Nock, 2009; Klonsky, 2007). However, the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*) designates self-injury as a condition that requires further research – when this occurs in a current edition of the *DSM*, it often implies an inclusion in future issues (Nock, 2012, p. 256). It can be deduced, therefore, that self-injury is becoming recognised within the clinical profession as something to be concerned about.

NSSI has been associated with a range of self-reported functions. These functions include emotional regulation, self-punishment or communication of distress (Taylor et al, 2018, p. 759). Both Matthew K. Nock (2009, 2014) and E. David Klonsky (2007, 2015) have created models for understanding NSSI behaviour based on a functional categorisation. Working with a functional model for self-injury is perceived to be

important in helping to develop a phenomenological understanding of NSSI, in terms of the differing dominant subgroups of functions (Taylor et al, 2018, p. 760). Different functions may require different types of support and intervention, as well as public health awareness and prevention campaigns (Taylor et al, 2018, p.760). While the functional approach appears to be a useful model for identifying treatment in a clinical context, it also represents some unhelpful biases.

Peter J. Taylor et al (2018) provide a useful analysis of the various functional models created by both Nock and Klonsky. Edmondson et al comment that, to date, most reviews of studies focus on affect regulation as the most frequently reported function, followed by self-punishment and interpersonal influence (Edmondson et al, 2016, p. 114). Taylor et al suggest that such reviews do not give an in-depth analysis or up-to-date picture of the status of NSSI.

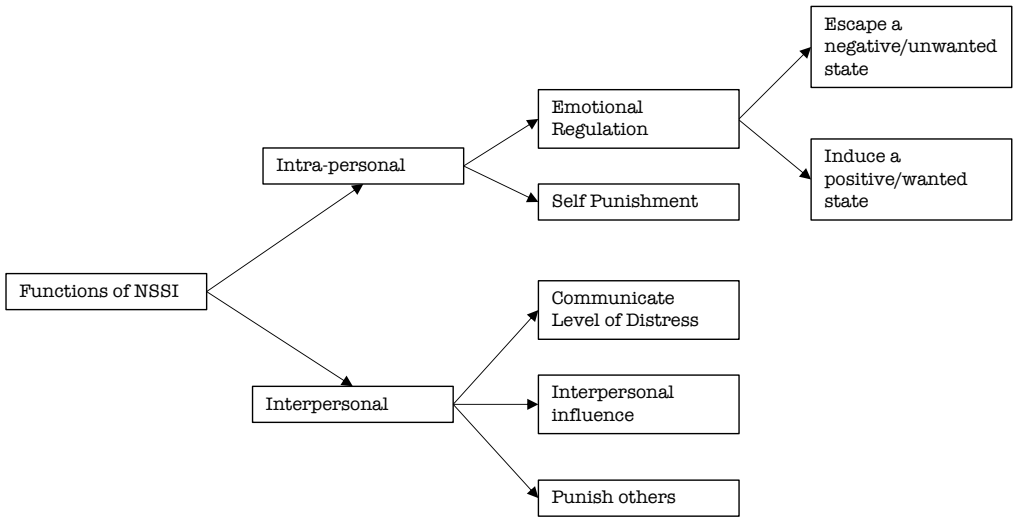


Figure 2, Categorisation of functions of NSSI, from Taylor et al (2018, p. 760)

As seen in the above diagram, Taylor and his co-researchers' meta-analysis divides the functions of NSSI into two categories: intra-personal and interpersonal (2018, p. 760). Intra-personal functions include emotional regulation, which has the 'purpose of regulating distressing or aversive thoughts or emotions, through escape, avoidance, replacement or direct modification of these states' and can include 'attempts to escape unwanted or aversive states and attempts to induce a positive or desired state' (Taylor et al, 2018, p. 760). Importantly this includes escape from a dissociated state (Klonsky, 2007, p. 229), which is a common self-reported function of NSSI. Self-punishment is included as the second function repeatedly identified in research within the intra-personal factor (Taylor et al, 2018; Edmondson et al, 2016; Klonsky, 2007). Taylor and his co-researchers argue that, while serving the purpose of regulating emotions, self-punishment has a different quality to the previous function, with different associations. They draw on Michelle Schoenleber, Howard Berenbaum and Robert Motl's research, 'Shame-related functions of and motivations for self-injurious behavior' (2014), whereby they propose that self-punishment is tied to specific emotional states, such as shame, that represent a distinct negative view of the self (Schoenleber et al, 2014, p. 204).[8] Interpersonal functions, meanwhile, are divided into three sections: those that represent attempts to communicate feelings of distress, described by Taylor et al as a passive function (2018, p. 761); those that are

[8] In their research paper, 'Shame-related functions of and motivations for self-injurious behavior', Schoenleber, Berenbaum and Motl report on the extent to which 'shame-related constructs' (2014, p. 204) play an important role as motivational factors for NSSI, specifically questioning whether research participants use NSSI to reduce shame.

intended to influence others; and finally those that are meant as a means to punish others. It is important to stress that individuals typically report a combination of functions underlying their NSSI behaviour (Klonsky, 2007, p. 228).

Taylor et al's analysis draws on data from non-clinical samples as well as those collected by mental health services. The reason for this is that they saw the need to recognise the implicit continuum in NSSI severity and that many people who engage in NSSI are living in the community. These are important factors in providing a full picture of the occurrence of NSSI, rather than reflecting on the one offered by the clinical system; however, the result is not necessarily an accurate picture, as most people who self-injure do so in private and rarely ask for help (Long, Manktelow and Tracey, 2013, p. 106).

Thus, an overview of the clinical approach to NSSI reveals some clear biases in the research and therefore in the subsequent treatment of the behaviour. In my opinion, the clinical viewpoint has several flaws. The primary flaw to mention at this point is that of the exclusion of the corporeal aspects of self-injury. As Chandler states in *Self-Injury, Medicine and Society: Authentic Bodies* (2015), 'self-injury is a practice… [which] …involves acting upon bodies, and through bodies: the body of the person self-injuring is both actor and acted upon' (2015, p. 28). I will describe this omission in more detail in the next section. In a broader critical context, Steggals asserts that the clinical viewpoint and consequent bias towards a medicalised approach to self-injury result from what he describes as an objectivist paradigm. He writes:

> The standard 'objectivist' paradigm typical of medical and biologically inspired psychiatry and psychology is ill-equipped to make sense of self-harm and we must instead pursue understanding through an interpretation of the meanings that are coded into the practice, which is to say the very meanings that are being articulated and used by people whenever they self-harm (Steggals, 2015, p. 14).

Steggals describes the objectivist paradigm as a 'well-entrenched perspective, strongly associated with the authority of natural science, medicine and the more biologically orientated approach to psychiatry and psychology' (2015, p. 18). As such, the paradigm fails to include a broader cultural and sociological enquiry, leading to, in my opinion, skewed interpretations of NSSI. I will now expand on the ways that self-injury has been analysed through a sociological lens.

1.4 The sociological context of self-injury

In their article, 'Nonsuicidal self-injury among nonclinical college women: lessons from Foucault', Efrosini Kokaliari and Joan Berzoff report an increase in NSSI among what they describe as 'nonpsychiatric populations' (2008, p. 260), thereby challenging the view that self-injury arises out of psychopathology alone (2008, p. 260). To date, most explanations for self-injury have been from a psychological point of view and have 'located the problem of self-injury within the individual' (Kokaliari and Berzoff, 2008, p. 260). These explanations fail to consider the impact of the broader society within which the person who is self-injuring resides. Kokaliari and Berzoff are among the many writers and researchers who assert that self-injury needs to be examined within the broader context of society, as well as through a psychological lens (Potter, 2003; Shaw, 2002, cited in Kokaliari and Berzoff, 2008; Steggals, 2015; Chandler, 2015). In Kokaliari and Berzoff's words, it is often that

‘society is not considered responsible for having produced the symptoms’ that lead to self-injury, so that ‘the human suffering brought about by political or societal pressures is turned into a personal and private pathology’ (2008, p. 266). The outcome of such an outlook is that those people self-injuring are required to internalise their suffering and relate with this pathology in isolation.

Several authors writing about self-injury through the sociological lens criticise the clinical approach, especially the argument that self-injury is an individualistic form of coping mechanism (Hill and Dallos, 2012; Bareiss, 2014; Chandler, 2015; Steggals, 2015) which diverts the attention away from those ‘relational and emotional difficulties’ that lead people to find ways to cope (Hill and Dallos, 2012, p. 473). As Chandler demonstrates, ‘the social’ is almost entirely left out of clinical research (2015). In her critique of the research territory, she explains that there are

> a number of ‘absences’ with regard to different disciplinary perspectives on self-injury and emotion: sociology has tended to foreground emotion and society; psychology privileges emotion and the individual; biological psychiatry addresses physical, biological processes (Chandler, 2015, p. 72).

The result is partial and largely biased views of self-injury, and so Chandler calls for a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of self-injury that can reveal a fuller understanding of the practice.

Steggals goes a long way in redressing this lack of balance through his model of the ontological, aetiological and pathological axes. He argues that analysing self-injury

through these dynamic and intersecting axes allows a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of all the aspects of the behaviour.

The ontological axis

The ontological axis considers those mechanisms and structures that are understood to be natural to the subject, and thereby implied in accounts of the nature and function of self-harm. These functions or structures 'make it a possible and even at times a necessary function for *this* kind of subject, who has *this* kind of body and *this* kind of psyche' (Steggals, 2015, p. 161). This axis is characterised by one of the most common functions of self-injury, that is, dealing with problematic 'psychic forces (usually negative emotions, racing thoughts or disturbing memories)' (Steggals, 2015, p. 84). It incorporates the function described in the clinical section of emotional regulation. Emotional regulation, or affect regulation, is described in clinical terms as one of the main functions of self-injury. I argue, in line with the above writers, that this singular approach is problematic. It suggests that there is a standard for emotional control, and that those who self-injure can't regulate their feelings according to that standard, turning to self-injury as a 'mechanism of emergency emotional expression, or "letting things out"' (Steggals, 2015, p. 47). Following Williams (1998), Chandler describes the contradictory understandings of what it is to be healthy in late-modern societies, whereby 'health is seen to require both control and release' (2015, p. 73). She cites Deborah Lupton (1998) who, having studied lay understandings of emotions, reports that emotional control is valued, but alongside the need for emotional release and expression (Lupton, 1998, cited in Chandler, 2015, p. 73). Such conflicting needs for emotional control and release 'reflect the contradictory

socio-cultural understandings of (emotional) health' (Chandler, 2015, p. 73), which have some bearing on the misunderstanding and consequent stigma of self-injury.

The aetiological axis

The aetiological axis complements and extends the ontological axis by exploring those factors connected to the cause and origin of a person's self-injury. While the ontological axis explains the structures that make self-injury possible, the aetiological axis explores those that make it probable (Steggals, 2015, p. 125). This axis examines the circumstances that make one person self-injure but not another. Steggals reports that the aetiological axis is characterised by another of the most common functions of self-injury, that of dissociation, or experiences of feeling unreal or not present (2015, p. 84).

Steggals claims that the concept of psychic trauma is crucial in understanding self-injury (2015, p.131). The *DSM-5* defines traumatic events as those that 'do not fit into "normal" experience and which therefore cannot be "processed" through a person's standard and normal ways of thinking and talking' (Caruth, 1995, quoted in Steggals, 2015, p. 127). Because these events cannot be 'processed', they remain a 'haunting' presence (Steggals, 2015, p. 127) that cannot be expressed through words or verbal language and therefore tends to be expressed (in some cases) through self-injury, in 'blood and pain' (Hewitt, 1997, p. 58, quoted in Steggals, 2015, p. 127). Traumatic events tend to lead to an experience of feeling separate from the world, as if the world has abandoned the individual, thereby producing a sense of estrangement or

dissociation (Steggals, p. 126). Steggals makes a subtle distinction between estrangement and dissociation that is drawn from his enquiry between a subjectivist and objectivist paradigm of self-injury. He reports that all the participants in his study experienced

> personal, emotional, social or existential estrangement; the sense that a wound had opened up between themselves and their experience, between themselves and their world. It was a wound that left them feeling that life, others, language and even their own sense of self had become strange, disordered and disturbing (Steggals, 2015, p. 127).

This is a description of estrangement through a subjectivist lens, wherein participants narrate their individual experience. Steggals goes on to say that estrangement 'appears in less metaphorical and more medical fashion as "dissociation"' (2015, p. 128), representing a move into the objectivist paradigm. In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Judith Herman writes that dissociation is a symptom of psychic trauma, that it characterises our disconnection from the world as we understand it. She makes use of words such as 'depersonalisation, derealisation and anesthesia' (Herman, 1992, p. 109) to describe dissociation and how it represents a state where the individual feels unreal, separate and distant to their environment. Elizabeth Howell defines dissociation in her book *The Dissociative Mind* (2005) as the 'separation of mental and experiential contents that would normally be connected' (2005, p. 18). For me, this problematic definition clearly demonstrates the medicalisation of the notion of estrangement and a move away from the subjectivist paradigm, where the individual's lived experience is included, towards a psychological and medical model.

The pathological axis

Finally, the pathological axis outlines 'the ideas and experiences associated with acts of self-harm, [and] what happens when the ontological structures mix with the aetiological conditions and a distinct and diagnosable result emerges' (Steggals, 2015, p. 84). This axis describes 'what it is like to be a [self-injurer]' (Steggals, 2015, p. 161) and how an individual's self-injury presents, in what form and, as such, gives a profile of the person who self-injures. The third common function of self-injury, self-punishment due to shame and self-loathing, can be mapped onto this axis (Steggals, 2015, p. 158). In her book, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body* (2015), Luna Dolezal examines our relationship with shame through a phenomenological lens. She proposes that shame carries a number of roles, and that it is seen as an important factor in supporting a cohesive and stable social world on the one hand, but that, on the other, it is limiting, restricting, can inhibit subjective experience and, at its worst, can be 'downright oppressive' (2015, p. xv). Dolezal puts forward a simple definition of shame, defining it as an experience that arises when the subject is concerned with the opinions others have of her as a result of some disgrace or transgression (2015, p. 2). Thomas Scheff expands the connection between shame and the social bond, describing the former as an emotion of social control that individuals feel when they are aware of the potential threat to a social bond (2000, p. 97). He suggests that we cannot live or grow without shame, that it is an integral part of our experience and an insidious force within our subjective being. In the context of self-injury, Steggals mentions the ambivalent nature of the wound as, 'on the one hand, it validates inner experience by manifesting emotions as blood, pain and scars, while, on the other, it acts as a stigma, as a mark of deviance

and shame, as evident of a defiled, tainted and discredited self' (2015, p. 161). Consequently, self-injury can mark a representation of the self-punishment and self-loathing that accompanies shame (Steggals, 2015, p. 158). Sara Ahmed points to the role of the body in feelings of shame, describing the latter as 'an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body' (2004, p. 103). This points to one of the largest omissions of the clinical approach to self-injury, that of the body.

Both Adler and Adler and Chandler argue that the body has to be attended to in any analysis of self-injury. As Adler and Adler say, those who self-injure 'write the text of their inner pain on their skin, transforming themselves as they do so' (2011, p. 4). Chandler's foundational thesis for her book, *Self-Injury, Medicine and Society: Authentic Bodies* (2015), is that corporeality must be considered in the context of a sociological analysis of self-injury. Adler and Adler, meanwhile, state that our bodies are inscribed with the stories of our lives and shaped by the imprint of society and culture (2011, p. 4). Chandler argues that the relationship with our bodies is especially interesting for those who self-injure, as we are both 'actor and acted upon', as mentioned earlier in the chapter, and since the act of self-injury involves 'acting upon bodies, and through bodies' (2015, p. 28). She proposes that any analysis of self-injury that excludes a focus on emotions or physical injuries reflects the enduring dualistic orientation towards the body, wherein the mind is highly valued and associated with characteristics such as masculinity, rationality and cognition, and the body is associated with femininity, nature, emotions and irrationality (Chandler, 2015, p. 29).

All these sociologists, through their own analyses, call for an integrated approach to self-injury that includes the body and its embodiment as 'nuanced, complex and multifaceted, subject to the interweaving of subjective experiences, interpersonal interactions, cultural processes, social organisation, institutional arrangements and social structure' (Waskul, 2006, cited in Adler and Adler, 2011, p. 5). Chandler proposes a phenomenological orientation towards self-injury, whereby 'we must engage intimately with the sensate aspects of the practice: the feel of the blood and flesh; the smells, sounds and sights that accompany the act of cutting skin with a sharp object or burning flesh; the swell of heat to an injury site' (2015, p. 31). Here, Chandler challenges the reader with the visceral language of self-injury, stressing that if we are to understand why someone would cut their skin repeatedly, 'we must engage with the body' (2015, p. 31).

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the written research on self-injury, focusing on historical, clinical and sociological perspectives. Using Steggals's three-axis model for understanding self-injury, I have explicated those areas within both clinical and sociological areas which overlap or conflict. It is in these areas of conflicting theories, between the clinical and the sociological approaches, that this research project's the contribution to knowledge is revealed.

Firstly, understanding what Steggals describes as the objectivist and subjectivist approaches to self-injury exposes some important biases that have pervaded in treatment of the behaviour. The objectivist approach observes the person through an over-medicalised and biological lens, in isolation from other factors in the individual's life. This gives clinicians a skewed viewpoint on the person who is self-injuring. Steggals calls for a more integrated approach that includes the subjectivist perspective, where the individual's lived experience, including the sociological and cultural backgrounds within which they live, becomes foregrounded.

Secondly, Steggals reassesses the notion of dissociation, taking it out of the solely objectivist paradigm and addressing it through a sociological perspective. From a clinical viewpoint, dissociation is a complex and confusing matter, reflecting, as mentioned previously, Dell and O'Neil's admission that 'the dissociation field is in need of some conceptual housekeeping' (2009, p. 20). This allows for the emergence of ambiguities in definitions and understandings of the concept through an objectivist lens. Steggals prefers the term estrangement to dissociation, which allows for the inclusion of the wider context within which the individual resides, accounting for a broader understanding that isn't singly focussed on the medicalised body.

Thirdly, drawing on Chandler, this chapter described the omission of the body in most understandings of self-injury. Addressing this omission is important to my practice research, whereby I make visual my corporeality in the context of the broader societal issues, through the materiality of film and sound installation.

The practice research further encounters and reveals new interpretations of the nature of dissociation and estrangement by drawing on Herman (1992), Adler (1985) and Steggals (2015). I find new ways of understanding the 'tormenting paradox' (Steggals, 2015, p. 128) of dissociation, that is numbing and yet leads to 'a feeling of unbearable agitation' (Herman, 1992, p. 109). Adler describes this phenomenon as a kind of 'annihilation panic' (Adler, 1985 in Steggals, 2015, p. 128), 'a fear that the self may become utterly cut off from reality or even eventually cease to be real, cease to exist altogether' (2015, p. 128). This paradox can only be articulated, in my lived experience and in this research, through an exploration of my own corporeality, which for the purpose of this project has been accessed through movement practice and performative writing, and articulated through analogue film, sound and performance installation practice. I expand on my research methodology in Chapter Two.

Chandler (2015), Steggals (2015) and Adler and Adler (2015) caution against privileging the body in isolation during any sociological enquiry into self-injury. They suggest that this approach draws on the strongly individualistic model whereby the individual is elevated above the level of society, in what Adler and Adler describe as a neoliberal conception of individual rights. They maintain that the clinical, psycho-medical tradition uses this approach at the expense of social forces (Adler and Adler, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, in this research project, while practice foregrounds the body, I ensure that the body is situated in a broader container of social and cultural forces.

Finally, returning to the start of the chapter, if, as Kilby says, self-injury is impossible 'to bear witness to' (2001, p. 124), this thesis asserts the significance of my art practice as a crucial method for articulating the phenomenon of self-injury and making it possible to bear witness to. I will expand on this in the next chapter where I present my methodology and working methods for this research.

CHAPTER TWO

Evolution of a Research Practice:

Theoretical Framework, Research Methodology and Methods

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the personally situated practice research project that explores and analyses my lived experience of self-injury. My research methodology employs a combination of embodied autoethnographic methods, such as movement practice and writing, theoretical enquiries of corporeality, phenomenology, new materialism and material feminisms, along with artistic practice methods, which focus on 16mm analogue film, sound, performance and installation practice. I explain the evolution of the methodology that developed from an iterative experimental approach that positioned the body at its core, because self-injury is acted on the body. I refer to this as an embodied onto-epistemological methodology, as it interweaves the discursive with the corporeal, drawing on Karen Barad's concept of onto-epistemology (2007) while situating my embodied practices at its centre. Throughout, I depend on my own lived experience and the emerging tacit and somatic knowledge that all the research stages are informed and guided by.

Lived experience is a term that has entered our common lexicon in recent years, and yet it seems hard to define. In an article in *The Spectator* scoping the history of the term 'lived experience', James Innes-Smith traces it back to Simone de Beauvoir's

The Second Sex, first published in 1949. He explains how in order to answer the question '*What is a woman?',* de Beauvoir argues that we need to examine more than just biological characteristics (2021). Initially, Book 2 of *The Second Sex*, entitled '*L'expérience vécue*' (lived experience) was translated into English as '*Woman's Life Today*' (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, 2009, p. 32). Following this, the *Redstockings Manifesto* published on 7 July 1969[9] stated:

> We regard our personal experiences and feelings about experience as the basis for an analysis of our common situation … Our chief task is to develop female class consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our situations (no date).

It is clear that the term was rooted in feminist scholarship; however, lately it has become more widely used. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods (Volume 2)*, Robin M. Boylorn writes of lived experience that it

> speaks to the personal and unique perspective of researchers and how their experiences are shaped by subjective factors of their identity including race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, political associations, and other roles and characteristics that determine how people live their daily lives (2008, p. 489).

She goes on to say that this approach leads to a self-awareness that includes life within an individual context as well as in a broader social and cultural sense, therefore 'lived experience allows a researcher to use a single life to learn about society and about how individual experiences are communicated' (Boylorn, 2008, p. 489). My approach is comprised of autoethnographic methods that draw on my lived experience.

[9] Redstockings was one of the founding and pivotal women's liberation movements of the 1960s in America. (Redstockings, no date).

As an artist, I employ an immersive haptic installation practice with 16mm film, sound and video to create work which generates an embodied experience for the audience, through site, scale of imagery and volume, type and texture of sound. The emerging methodology has pointed the way towards the methods I would use, facilitating meaning and revealing new knowledge through an embodied approach, from performative writing to analogue filming processes and installation practice – all of which are explained in depth as the chapter progresses.

2.2 Situating the body in my research methodology

Elizabeth Adams St Pierre, in her essay 'Troubles with Embodiment', the afterword to *Methodologies of Embodiment: Inscribing Bodies in Qualitative Research* which is edited by Mia Perry and Carmen Liliana Medina (2020), admits that she 'never quite understood embodiment' because fundamentally she didn't believe in the need to point out 'that *we are bodies* and are completely entangled with the world' (2020, p. 138, author's emphasis). Although refreshing, Adams St Pierre's thinking evokes a little sadness in me because that has not been my experience and I want to be in a world where such embodied entanglement is the norm. Adams St Pierre writes that 'embodiment is thinkable only if one believes the body is absent and must be reintroduced' (2020, p. 146). However, Perry and Medina (2020) and Laura L. Ellingson (2017) express the view that the body *is* absent in the way that we relate to our bodies in culture and society, thereby making a case for the need and benefits of embodiment in research. As someone who self-injures, I am a body, acting on my own body, therefore the inclusion of an embodied methodology into my practice

research has been crucial for me. Even so, at the outset of the project, I didn't have a strong grasp of what this would mean in terms of practice, though I did have a deep intuitive sense that inclusion of the body was critical to the life of my research. I suggest that my difficulty with existing definitions of embodiment, in both research and art practice, are born from living in a culture that largely dismisses the importance, or even presence, of bodies. Because the body and embodiment tend to have ambiguous meanings, in this chapter I define embodied research within the parameters of my project, and analyse the methodology and corresponding methods that unfolded as the project progressed, and the theoretical threads that became entwined throughout the research project.

Perry and Medina characterise embodiment as 'bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities', and 'a state that is contingent upon the environment and the context of the body' (2011, p. 63). By acknowledging the presence of my body through an embodied enquiry that includes both ontological and epistemological methods, I have witnessed the emergence of new knowledge in the context of modes of embodiment. I became intimately involved with my own sensate body, paying attention to both the somatic[10] and tacit information that it held, and developed methods to reveal this knowledge, such as meditation and movement practice, performative writing and video making.

[10] In his contextualisation of the need for greater somatic self-consciousness in *Body Consciousness, A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics,* Richard Shusterman maintains that the term 'soma' refers to 'a living, feeling, sentient body rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation' (2008, p. 1).

My methodology is underpinned by the idea that my body holds knowledge. Tacit knowledge is 'knowledge that is not explicated' (Collins, 2010, p.1), and includes the skills that we need for bodily performances, such as riding a bicycle or driving a car, but 'may also point to culture-specific intuitions and pre-reflexive assumptions that determine the way we interact with the world and with society' (Adloff, Gerund and Kaldewey, 2015, p. 7). Michael Polanyi makes a useful distinction between tacit and explicated knowledge, mentioning the paradox of the relationship between the two:

> Now we see *tacit knowledge* opposed to *explicit knowledge*; but these two are not sharply divided. While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence all knowledge is *either tacit* or *rooted in tacit knowledge*. A *wholly* explicit knowledge is unthinkable (1969, p. 144, author's emphasis).

In this research project, I am concerned with somatic knowledge, which expands beyond the tacit knowledge needed to ride a bicycle, for example, towards the deeply intuitive and imaginative realm of the body. I use movement practice to aid, in the words of Jane Bacon,[11] 'the discovery and development of language [knowledge] that emerges uniquely from the experience of being a moving, perceiving body' (2012, p. 116).

Through the life of my research, it became clear to me that there are ambiguities around ideas of the body. Ellingson suggests that the ideas about the relationship between the mind and the body point to a tension in what is meant by embodiment or

[11] Jane Bacon is a teacher of Authentic Movement and Jungian Analyst, and Professor Emerita at the University of Chichester, UK.

'the body' (2017, p. 2). She goes on to say that, on the one hand, philosophers and scholars subscribe to a notion of the body as an entity that is created and inscribed by culture, whereas, on the other hand, bodies are seen as constituting our essential qualities – such as emotions, physical characteristics and gut instinct – and material being (Ellingson, 2017, p. 2). It is 'how we come to interpret bodies' (Ellingson, 2017, p. 2), through the lens of both cultural meanings and physical materiality, that is relevant to my research project. Stephanie Jones and James F. Woglom claim that the body 'is simultaneously physical and affective, social and individual, produced and producing, reproductive and innovative' (2020, p. 116). This description of the body is helpful to my research as it doesn't limit the body simply to materiality or sociological meanings that are inscribed upon it, but rather suggests an inter-relational complexity that doesn't reduce the body to binaries. A broader and more nuanced scope is possible which I utilise in my research and expand on in this chapter.

As many writers – including Perry and Medina and Ellingson – reflect, the privileging of the mind over the body in Western society is both deeply engrained and is largely the legacy of Descartes's philosophy.[12] This is problematic from a feminist perspective as the mind is associated with masculinity, which is in turn linked to rationality and knowledge production, and the body with femininity, corresponding to

[12] 'Under the legacy of Descartes' philosophy, rationality dictates that the (higher) mind-self should seek to control its body-property, preferably to the point of rendering it absent, or at least irrelevant, to any knowledge project (often referred to as "Cartesian dualism")' (Ellingson, 2017, p. 5). Ellingson explains that Descartes's use of language concerning the mind-self and the body-property is pertinent to his thinking where the mind is the self and the body is the property of the mind.

reproduction and the subjectivity of emotion but without the capacity to think. While this hierarchical duality pervades, the body, femininity and emotion are subjugated by the mind, masculinity and knowledge production. As mentioned in the Introduction, new materialist feminist Elizabeth Grosz uses the Möbius strip as a model to describe how the body/mind subject might best be served, stating that 'bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives' (1994, p. xii). Grosz goes on to say that the model provides a way to rethink

> [t]he relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity and reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, the vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and outside into the inside (1994, p. xii).

Grosz is hence proposing that the Möbius strip can help us to understand the relationship between the body and the mind, but also to comprehend the body's interiority and exteriority. These embodied qualities of interior and exterior (or object and subject) reveal themselves throughout my art practice presented here, with a particular focus on *Flesh[wound]* in Chapter Five.

In an impassioned plea to include traditional phenomenology in new theories of the body emerging at the end of the last century, Helen Marshall, in her examination of her lived experience of pregnancy, takes a helpfully pragmatic position on the body/mind question. Marshall reflects that her lived experience showed her 'how slippery the concept of the body can be, and how pervasive is mind/body dualism'

(1999, p. 70). In the context of my research methodology, I find her view useful as she suggests that we acknowledge that it isn't easy to navigate beyond a dualist account of the body, to accept the difficulty and 'give up trying to find a concept that integrates the body and the self'[13] (Marshall, 1999, p. 70). Like Grosz, Marshall uses the metaphor of the Möbius strip to articulate her answer to the body/mind question, although her analysis differs slightly. She argues that the Möbius strip is useful in articulating notions of the 'external (biological) body and the internal (social) self as distinct at a given moment and from a given perspective, but as seamlessly united overall' (1999, p. 70), which comes from a strongly phenomenological perspective. Both Grosz and Marshall's formulations of the body/mind dynamic are useful in that they point directly at the ambiguity of the mind and the body and the problems we encounter when trying to define these notions as discrete packages. Throughout my doctoral research, I encountered ambiguities around ideas of mind and body, object and subject. These questions cannot be resolved through simple definitions and analyses, and we need to acknowledge the ambiguity and allow the slippage between these ideas, as both Marshall and Grosz propose, which is why the use of the Möbius strip is so helpful. I suggest that working through artistic research methods can help describe these concepts more clearly, allowing audiences to gain understanding through an embodied perspective. In the following chapters, I will expand on these ambiguities through an examination of my art practice research and how it answers the resulting questions. Marshall goes on to write that in her lived experience, 'there is a clear division between mind, equated with self, experienced as

[13] As described in the previous footnote, the mind has been referred to as the 'mind-self'. It can be assumed that Marshall is referring to the same in this quote.

proactive, and unthreatening and body, experienced as potentially troublesome' (1999, p. 71). Her view is interesting in the context of my research, especially as I find the opposite to be true, that my mind – if I entertain the notion of a separate mind – is problematic and not an accurate representation of myself, and that my body is more trustable as it is where I get a stronger sense of myself as a unified whole that *includes* the mind. It is this embodied trust that my methodology draws on to respond to my research questions. In this, I concur with Craig Gingrich-Philbrook when he says that splitting the mind from the body is a limiting move (2001, pp. 1-7). Ronald Pelias, a writer and researcher on autoethnography, poetic inquiry and performative writing, whose methods have been instrumental in inspiring the writing aspect of my research, writes:

> Knowing that the body and the mind only know what they know in conjunction with the other, I am beckoned to lean into the affective, to write, not just about the affective, but to create it on the page (Pelias, 2020, p. 8).

This articulates clearly the body/mind inflection that Grosz points to in the use of the Möbius strip as metaphor and informs my research methodology through writing practice.

2.3 Building an embodied onto-epistemological methodology

The idea of the mind inflecting into the body and vice versa is a useful means for communicating the process whereby my embodied ontological research, largely through movement and writing methods, feeds into the theoretical enquiry, having

been richly informed by the body's exploration of itself. While developing my research through artistic responses to corporeal and theoretical studies, I entered a state that can be described as bridging both body and mind, between embodied knowing and mindful knowing, an interstitial space that became yet another locus of knowing. This onto-epistemological relationship became the central point from which my research methodology emerged.

My experience shows, as Ellingson purports, that embodiment is integral to research processes, whether acknowledged or not. In most cases, research is represented as though knowledge was produced 'without unruly bodies involved' (Ellingson, 2017, p. 6), thereby leaving the overt presence of the body out of the research process. In my research, I welcome my 'unruly body', while also, as Karen Barad argues in *Meeting the Universe Half-Way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, acknowledging the need for the discursive so that embodied research does not reject the mind, rather includes it (2007, pp. 3-39). Barad writes that the discursive and the material need to be brought together for enquiry. She proposes an onto-epistemology where 'knowing is a material practice of engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming', as opposed to the binary of ontology and epistemology which, she says, creates a distance between the known and the unknown, between seeing, observing and knowing (Barad, 2007, p. 89). In the context of my embodied research, onto-epistemology allows me to develop a methodology that functions both through the materiality of my body and through the discursive context of my mind, reflecting the Möbius strip where an interstitial

engagement between the two is possible. Ellingson is careful not to prescribe definitive concrete instructions for researchers. Instead, she recommends an embodied methodology that includes 'flexible possibilities as jumping off points rather than authoritative endings' (Ellingson, 2017, p. 4). This is a helpful standpoint for my methodology and the methods that have emerged iteratively, drawing on the theoretical frameworks and corresponding material of my art practice. The theoretical frameworks are explored through my lived experience of self-injury, using the methods of writing, installation, sound and performance, and working with 16mm film through its materiality, photochemical properties and image-making capacity.

I became onto-epistemologically aware of the ambiguities of my body through an embodied and somatic enquiry of my lived experience and a discursive enquiry consisting of theoretical engagement and reflection. This was initially guided by Husserl's phenomenological distinction between 'the physical, objective and measurable *Körper* and the living, subjective *Leib*' (Ayouch, 2009, p. 5). *Körper* refers to the physicality of the body, bones and muscles, which many embodiment theorists – such as Grosz (1994), Iris Marion Young (1980) and Richard Shusterman (2008) – would refer to as the body-as-object, and *Leib* refers to 'intimate historical life felt from within' (Ayouch, 2009, p. 5), or the body-as-subject. I was interested in the lived experience of both these *states*, and I refer to them as my experienced body (or lived body) and objectified body. In this, I draw on Shusterman's assertion that 'I … both *am* body and *have* a body' (2008, p. 3).

Shusterman has developed strategies that merge theoretical phenomenological thinking with embodied practice of this nature, and it is this combination that has proved critical for the emergence of my embodied research methodology (2008). Underpinning my research is the idea that we are both a subject that experiences the world and an object that exists within the world (2008, p. 3), while also recognising that body, mind and culture are deeply interdependent (2006, p. 2). Shusterman refers to this methodology as somaesthetics, which he defines 'as the critical, ameliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning' (2000, p. 267). That is to say, I can fully explore my own 'lived somatic experience and performance' as well as an 'abstract, discursive knowledge of the body' (Shusterman, 2006, p. 2) through somaesthetic methods – Shusterman describes this as a practice that brings one into the present-time, lived experience of one's body. Such practices are based on a somatic self-awareness which, as Shusterman says, 'activates the whole person, as subject and object' (2008, p. 98).

Following Shusterman's methodology, my body became the locus of my enquiry, allowing the unfolding of an ontological knowing that informed my exploration of theoretical frameworks, such as phenomenology and feminist embodiment, that, in turn, let me turn inwards to my experienced or lived body in order to enquire further through an embodied lens and armed with new philosophical understandings. This became the basis for a cyclically informed embodied onto-epistemological research methodology. However, by employing the concept of the Möbius strip, the embodied

versus discursive binary is reduced to the point where the delineation between one and the other becomes blurred and indistinct.

As the research progressed, it became important to acknowledge my female embodiment. Particular extracts of my performative writing pointed to my personal history, physical and emotional landscapes and environmental contexts through a gendered perspective that could not be ignored. Kathy Davis, feminist scholar of women's bodies and health, and editor of *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (1997), explains how 'phenomenology has provided a useful theoretical starting point for making sense of the lived experience of having a female body' (1997, p. 9), but that the theoretical discussion made limited reference to sexual difference or gender. In *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (2005), Iris Marion Young cites this omission, writing, '[t]he image of woman has not ceased being that of the Other: the surface that reflects fantasies and fears arising from our human being as vulnerable bodies' (2005, p. 3). The purpose of this book, first published in 1977, she states, is to describe 'embodied being-in-the-world through modalities of sexual and gender difference' (Young, 2005, p. 7). In the essay 'Throwing Like a Girl', Young expresses the fact that 'feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing – a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into movement, a thing that exists as *looked at and acted upon*' (2005, p. 39). Consequently, Young proposes that women experience themselves through their bodies as objects as well as subjects (2005, p. 39). Furthermore, Davis, making her case for an embodied feminism, suggests that our bodies are not abstract, that they

are embedded in the 'immediacies of everyday lived experience' (1997, p. 15). She stresses the importance of including what she describes as the 'symbolic and the material', that is, 'representations of the body and embodiment as experience or social practice on concrete social, cultural and historical contexts' (Davis, 1997, p. 15). Therefore, embodied feminism joined my lexicon of methodology in order to support the articulation of my lived experience through the materiality of film and performance in the context of installation, whereby I express a gendered position through the relationship of the film strip with the machinery of the projectors (see Chapter Four for a detailed analysis).

Finally, during my engagement with the materiality of my body, through an embodied and artistic practice of 16mm filmmaking, new materialist feminism provided a useful theoretical lens to further support this research project. Feminist materialism has emerged from discursive, postmodern feminisms in order to include the matter of the body (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008, pp. 2–3). As Alaimo and Hekman write, this is 'feminist theory … taking matter seriously' (2008, p. 6). Such an outlook provides a way to reflect on the materiality of the body, as described by Alaimo and Hekman, 'as an active, sometimes recalcitrant, force' (2008, p. 4). Finding an equivalence between the materiality of the body of film with my own body, and that of the audience, has allowed me to articulate the finer nuances of my lived experience.

2.4 Methods

Embodied consciousness movement practice

At the start of this research project, I already had many years' experience of an embodied consciousness movement practice, and so a personal conversance with a method of enquiry through my body. Employing this practice creates an embodied state whereby somatic knowledge becomes easily accessible through my body and through accompanying words, which I express in writing. When I began my PhD project, the natural route into research was through this movement practice. Glenn Carruthers, in his book *The Feeling of Embodiment: A Case Study in Explaining Consciousness* (2019), describes consciousness as how we experience our bodies. My embodied consciousness movement practice focusses on direct experience and facilitates, in Shusterman's words, a 'greater attention to somatic self-consciousness' (2008, p. 1). My movement practice is similar to Authentic Movement, developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse. Bacon refers to Authentic Movement as 'active imagination in movement' (2012, p. 115), further describing it as

> a process in which a participant is invited to notice with all her being, to listen with ears that have never heard before, to see with eyes that look as for the first time and, perhaps most importantly, to move or be moved as she has never moved before (2015, p. 115).

This quote points to the depth of the unfolding that is possible with my movement practice. In practice, I follow my sensorial embodied experience to lead a free movement that wants to happen through the intelligence, intuition and imagination of my body. This physical, sensorially led movement leads to a greater somatic consciousness and understanding. The resulting embodied awareness reveals the emotional textures in my body that point to direct experience in the present moment,

but also to historical, sometimes traumatic, memory. Experiencing this new somatic consciousness helped me to develop a strong writing practice that paved the way into my research project. Consequently, my body becomes an active ally in my research and I draw on my somatic and tacit knowledge to develop my writing practice.

Autoethnographic method: performative writing

Holding the tool or the weapon… How might I describe it? As the vehicle through which I draw my own blood? A scalpel, a razor blade, a shard of glass... Looking at the pale tender flesh of my inner right arm, stroking it, almost lovingly. Moving the tool slowly and deliberately across the skin, there's this frisson running through my body, and there appears to be a number of witnesses here: one is squeamish; another ferocious, hungrily longing for blood; another watches silently, coolly, waiting, for the relief to come. As the tool moves across the surface of the skin, the speed and smoothness depend on the sharpness of the chosen tool. The skin begins to burn, to open, blood comes. Ah, there's the relief. As the skin parts, even if a little, it's as though I can see inside, into my own body, through the skin. The blood is evidence, the flesh beneath the surface is evidence of my existence. Here I am. Breath, body, blood, flesh.

Journal entry, October 2016

My movement practice led to the emergence of insights I could then express through autoethnographic narrative methods such as writing and video making. Tony E. Adams et al suggest that autoethnographic stories 'are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience' (2015, p. 1). This *artistic and analytic* demonstration reflects the meeting point emerging through my methodology, where my body and mind become aligned in order to make visual my lived experience of self-injury. In my practice, up to this point, I would use video to capture a sense of the metaphorical equivalence that this

sensory-aesthetic appreciation or, following Shusterman, 'aesthesis', was pointing to (2008, p. 1). I would then edit these videos to give the audience an equivalent embodied experience. David Batchelor discusses in *Equivalence is a Strange Word* the nature of equivalence in the context of Carl Andre's collection of artwork from 1966, *Equivalent I–VIII*. He proposes that equivalence is dealing in 'a kind of ratio of likeness to unlikeness' (Batchelor, 1996, p. 16). Equivalence, Batchelor writes, can be expressed as a drawing together or drawing apart, 'showing areas of likeness among apparently dissimilar things, or […] showing forms of unlikeness among apparently identical things' (1996, p. 16). Gathering material in this way is similar to journal writing, allowing my body to guide the process in order to let the visual story emerge. I used this filming method along with the autoethnographic writing practice known as performative writing. For example, at the start of the project, just after my sister died, I made short video clips of her shoes, of the worn soles and of the empty space within them, both of which represented an equivalence of her absence. The two methods work in tandem to allow the words and the imagery to emerge from my embodied movement practice as an expression of lived experience.

The writing practice allowed a subjective interplay of memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency (Smith and Watson, 2009, p. 9). This autobiographical 'telling', Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest 'enacts the "self" that it claims has given rise to an "I". And that "I" is neither unified nor stable – it is fragmented, provisional, multiple, in process' (2002, p. 9). Consequently, performative writing gave me direct entry into my lived experience of self-injury, revealing itself firstly

through physical sensation, before forming itself as words in fragments and then constructed sentences. The words that emerged shed light on the complexity of the body in my subjective research methodology. As Pelias says, this manner of writing 'welcomes the body into the mind's dwellings' (2005, p. 417), thus serving 'as a method for evoking human experiences' (2014, p. 8).

I take my lead from Hélène Cixous, who begins her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) with the words:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into her own movement (1976, p. 875).

As I began to 'write my body', as Cixous demands, I began to get a sense of her guidance, that,

> by writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth (1976, p. 880).

Cixous's words reflect the need for the inclusion of my female body in this research through writing. My writing could become formless, flowing, fluid, metaphorical, my feminist voice, in the spirit of what Cixous calls *écriture feminine* (1976).

As mentioned in the introduction, there are performative writing extracts included throughout this thesis in red which invite the reader into an embodied sense of my research. Performative writing provides a sensorial representation of my lived experience. In this way, 'an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place [the reader] closer to the subjects we wish to study' (Pelias, 2004, p. 1, cited in Gale and Wyatt, 2010, p. 8) and, in the case of this thesis, to my own lived experience.

Taking a reflexive view on my writing has allowed me to connect my lived experience to phenomenological methodologies. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

> [T]he life of consciousness... is subtended by an 'intentional arc' which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological, and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects (1974, p. 136).

Performative writing has likewise provided a medium with which to explicate my 'human setting', current and historical, in order to understand the context within which my self-injuring was occurring. Paul Crowther explains that 'rational, sensory, affective and socio-historical factors are interwoven in an inseparable unity' (1993, p. 2), resulting in what he describes as ontological reciprocity. This reciprocity with the world cannot be truly understood through purely philosophical or theoretical terms (Crowther, 1993, p. 2). Crowther goes on to say that, in order to give true meaning to ontological reciprocity, we need to come back to our actual embodied experience as

a ‘human being-in-the-world’ (1993, p. 1 - 2). By researching my experience of being a ‘human being-in-the-world’, and relating to audiences as the same, this ontological reciprocity became an important concept in helping me analyse my lived experience of self-injury and communicate it to audiences.

Use of installation practice as research method

Due to the immersive nature of installation art, I used the practice to facilitate an embodied understanding of self-injury for audiences. Claire Bishop loosely defines installation art as artwork into which the viewer enters, and often refers to it as immersive, experiential or theatrical (2010, p. 6). Julia Kristeva, who served on the jury for the 1993 Venice Biennale, observes that in an installation the body ‘in its entirety is asked to participate through its sensations, through vision obviously, but also hearing, touch, on occasions smell’ (1996, pp. 27–8). Installation art presupposes a viewing subject who walks into the work to experience it (Bishop, 2010, p. 6), and as a result ‘both viewer and environment are regarded as material components of the work’ (Elwes, 2015, p. 166). In the context of cinema, Siegfried Kracauer maintains that film images engage the viewer physiologically through her senses before she can engage intellectually (1997, p. 158). However, I suggest that video and sound installation has the same capacity to impact the audience through their sensory perception. Bishop describes this phenomenon as activated spectatorship, through which art installations can emphasise ‘sensory immediacy’

(2010, p. 11). Catherine Elwes's[14] analysis of installation art in the context of moving image in her book *Installation and the Moving Image* (2015) provides essential insights for this practice research project. She writes that moving image installation 'embodies the perceptual doubleness of the spectator' (Elwes, 2015, p. 2), in that we can hold more than one reality in our consciousness, and we are increasingly called upon to make perceptual shifts between a number of remediated realities (Elwes, 2015, p. 2). Elwes goes on to say that it is the visitors who create the 'final, vital ingredient in the constellation of elements that make up a moving image installation' (2015, p. 3).

Use of photochemical film practice as research method

The use of installation along with performance, sound and 16mm analogue film became integral to my methodology as these methods immerse the viewers in a haptic experience of self-injury through their senses. I turned to 16mm film as a mode of exploration because the medium made me aware of the sensations in my body as I worked with the photochemical properties of film and the projectors within the installations. The tactile sensations of touching and manipulating the film, of threading the projector and the aural sensation of the sound as the film flows through the projector all were experienced through the body. Kim Knowles reflects in her article 'Blood, sweat, and tears – Bodily inscriptions in contemporary experimental film' (2013) that the increasing awareness of analogue film's limited lifespan, both

[14] Catherine Elwes is also an artist, curator and critic, interested specifically in video and time-based media and installation. She was part of the collective Women's Free Arts Alliance in the 1970s which offered a women-only space for artists (Live Art Development Agency, 2016).

materially and culturally, has facilitated discussion through bodily metaphor (2013). Knowles quotes the American artist Bradley Eros in support of this 'cherished medium' where he says:

> Trans-film, analogous to a human life, a presence that comes into being, decays and dies, it could be embraced as anima incarnate, that is, conscious of its own mortality and celebrated for its precious existence of material vulnerability (Eros, quoted in Knowles, 2013, p. 449).

Using this methodology, I discovered that the materiality of film processes and technology allowed me to reflect through new materialist feminist theory in order to articulate emerging new knowledge in the context of art installation practice.

Performance as research method

I positioned myself in the installation in some of the artworks, for example, *Scratching Below the Surface* (2017) and *Pinch Point* (2019). Placing myself physically in the installation space allowed me to become part of the artwork and thereby shift the relationship between myself and the audience, and myself and the context of the work, in order to facilitate a greater sense of embodied perception within the audience. This echoes Rebecca Schneider's text *Solo, Solo, Solo* (2005), where she writes that the artist becomes the object wherein the site of 'the work shifts to the space between the object and the maker, the object and the viewer, the object and any given context' (2005, p. 33).

The use of sound as method

Within the installation spaces, using sound became a crucial method. The sounds of the projectors, as well as the manipulation of sound through contact mics, I suggest, expands the perception of the audience. I refer to Stephen Connor's assertion that listening 'restores us to a sense of being in the middle of the world' (2000, p. 15). In her book *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010), Salomé Voegelin writes:

> The auditory engagement, however, when it is not in the service of simply furnishing the pragmatic visual object, pursues a different engagement. Left in the dark, I need to explore what I hear. Listening discovers and generates the heard (2010, p. 4).

She argues that listening is not a receptive mode so much as a method of exploration, a mode of 'walking through the soundscape/the sound work' (Voegelin, 2010, p. 4), and maintains that what we hear is 'discovered not received' and 'this discovery is generative, a fantasy: always different and subjective and continually, presently now' (Voegelin, 2010, p. 4). Additionally, John Wynne suggests that 'aural phenomena undo the lines between public and private' (Elwes, 2015, p. 208). Sound crosses boundaries between inside and outside, reverberating in our body (Brown, cited in Elwes, 2015, p. 208). I use sound in my research study in ways that reverberate through the environment and through the audience's bodies inviting them to become aware of themselves within their surroundings to a greater or lesser degree.

Audience response as research method

Finally, I considered audience responses to the installation and performances as crucial to this research. When a new body of work was installed at each stage of the research, I invited audiences to see the work and where possible I would elicit verbal feedback from them in various ways. Audience members included academics and researchers from the university and the general public, who and how many depended on the location of the install. Audience responses are especially important for this research because I was interested in generating new embodied understandings of the lived experience of self-injury and the ways that installation practice could reveal these understandings to both myself and to audiences. As Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller remind me in *Between Us, audiences, affect and the in-between* (2017), I am embedded in my research, therefore it isn't possible to step outside of my subjective position even if I wanted to, and any attempt to do so runs the 'risk of homogenising responses' through anticipating the ''correct' way to engage with either the generics or specifics' of an artwork (2017, p.xiii).

Additionally, as I say in the section on installation practice as research method, on pages 92-93, the role of the audience is imperative in this method of art practice. As installations are an immersive experience, this immersion tends to be experienced through the senses, and, following Elwes, the audience is a vital element of an installation (2015, p.3). In the context of materialist film practice, many writers report the sensory effects of the materiality of film. For example, Nicholas Chare and Liz Watkins say that the 'fleshiness of film' is present in both the substance of the material of the film and in the 'sensual effects of the film upon the spectator' (2013,

p.76). John Hanhardt describes a ‘perceptual transaction’ between the viewer and the film (1976:44), which follows Merleau-Ponty’s reflection on cinema in saying ‘a movie is not a thought; it is perceived’ (1964:54). This points to the pre-reflective or precognitive space present before thinking occurs which I describe further in Chapter Four in my analysis of the installation *What Lies Beneath*. These references reflect the perceptual potential of materialist installations of the kind made as part of this research and therefore stress the importance of including audience responses in the research methodology. However, this isn’t as straight forward as it might seem. Whalley and Miller say that in those situations when there is a gap ‘between the sensate and the cognate’ (2017, p.79), in that pre-reflective space, language cannot fully articulate the experience. This method is further challenged by audiences’ desire to attribute ‘‘narrative’ identification, causal coherence and closure’ which Le Grice says is embedded in our culture (2011, p.160) making it difficult to transcend through the analogue installation practices such as looping and multiscreen projection that I employ in this research project. In the articulation of my lived experience of self-injury, I draw on my own narrative history, coming from ‘a narrative place’ (Hatfield, 2003, p. 56) and the work is witnessed by an audience coming from their own narrative position. Therefore, the work is interwoven with my and audience’s narrative threads that cannot be removed in interpretation. Consequently, in the gathering of the feedback I needed to be aware of these potential biases or challenges. Whilst I couldn’t be sure to eliminate these biases I could reduce them through the means of questioning and gathering feedback.

Because my research focused on embodiment, I was interested in the corporeal, pre-reflective element of the feedback from my audiences. Therefore, the feedback reported here, as part of the analysis of the artworks described in Chapters 4 and 5, validates my claims as to the effects of the artwork on audiences. Audiences to my installations and performances varied, mostly coming from local communities and artists, in the case of *What lies beneath* (2018) in the Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge and the first installation of *…my beauty…*(2019) and *Flesh[wound]* (2019) as part of Plymouth Art Weekender, and academics and co-researchers, in the case of the *Scratching below the surface* (2018) and *Pinch Point* (2019). Consequently, most of the feedback also came from either co-researchers or other artists, but not exclusively. It is important to state that the feedback reflects this highly reflexive analytical response that both artists and researchers tend to examine artwork with. At each showing of the work I had informal conversations with visitors, gathering their responses to the work in written form. I performed *Pinch Point* at a research test space event, following which I gathered feedback from the participants, this was in the form of verbal contributions in a group context, gathered in written form by another participant.

Notwithstanding the challenges that gathering feedback presents, I believe it was worthwhile, in order to gather audiences' corporeal understandings, impressions, interpretations and awareness of my installation practice in the context of my research questions.

2.5 Conclusion

My methodology has allowed the formation of an iterative and dynamic theorisation and employment of diverse methods, including movement practice, performative writing, 16mm film, sound and performance installation practice and the use of audience responses in analysing the practice. This was all primarily facilitated by an embodied enquiry, which meant that, as I became more literate with my embodied expression, both through writing and art practice, new theorisation emerged, leading to new sense-making and revelation. My research became interdisciplinary and cyclical in nature, resulting in, as Estelle Barrett suggests in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry,* the 'generation of new ways of modelling meaning, knowledge and social relations' (2010, p. 3). There are three main processes at play within my embodied onto-epistemological methodology: my embodied enquiry; my theoretical engagement with this embodied enquiry; and the artistic practice research. There is an interrelationship between all three, whereby they co-exist in harmony, feed and inform each other, or create a dynamic tension, through which contributions to new knowledge is made.

CHAPTER THREE

Installation Practice and Expanded Cinema: Artistic Context

In this chapter, I provide an understanding of the field in which my practice research is situated. This includes a discussion of the relationship between installation art and expanded cinema, followed by an analysis of the works of a selection of artists whose practice has influenced my research.

3.1 Installation practice and expanded cinema

I use installation practice in order to immerse the audience in the artwork, and therefore employ affective means of transmission. I do this through the materiality of analogue film, and the imagery and sound produced by the machinery in the installation space. Claire Bishop describes installation practice as 'immersive' (2010, p. 6), meaning that the audience has a 'heightened awareness' (2010:11) of the art space because they walk into and around the work, which subjects them to a 'sensory immediacy' (2010:11) to what is happening. In my art practice, immersion occurs through the modality of embodied knowing and gives the audience a direct experience of the artwork, thus allowing them the possibility to feel through their bodies a close proximation to my lived experience of the transition between two states of body-as-object and body-as-subject in the context of self-injury.

At this point, it is pertinent to discuss the interrelationship between installation art and expanded cinema in my practice. One of the first accounts of expanded cinema was

offered by Sheldon Renan in *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (1967), where he writes:

> [Expanded cinema] is the name for a spirit of inquiry that is leading in many different directions… its work is more spectacular, more technological, and more diverse in form than that of the avant garde/experimental film so far (1967, p. 227).

Gene Youngblood develops this notion further in *Expanded Cinema* (1970). He explains:

> When we say expanded cinema we actually mean expanded consciousness. […] Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes (1970, p. 41).

Both Renan and Youngblood refer to expanded cinema as a manner of enquiry and the corresponding consciousness, beyond material practice. The concept has a broad reach in terms of practice, but essentially it can be described as 'situated/locational film' or 'artists' cinema', and as the 'collective term for an opening out of the filmic encounter' (Elwes, 2015, p. 164). As Catherine Elwes maintains, expanded cinema 'turns attention away from conventional narrative' (2015, p. 165). In his essay 'Expanded cinema and narrative: a troubled history' (2011), Alan L. Rees describes a binary perspective of expanded cinema:

> [U]topian and 'spiritualising' kinds of expanded cinema were […] challenged by other kinds that stripped down and explored the material components of their respective media – light and filmstrip projection in film, the video signal and cathode ray tube in video (2011, p. 17).

There is an interesting dialogue between two potential positions which are particularly useful in the context of my research project. According to Jonathan

Walley, in his essay '"Not an Image of the Death of Film": Contemporary Expanded Cinema and Experimental Film' (2011), expanded cinema's recent focus has become narrowed down to its materiality, 'returning film to its privileged status' (2011, p. 243). This reflects Malcolm Le Grice's view, drawing on the importance of the materiality of the filmic environment. He says about expanded cinema that it

> refocuses on the drama of the apparatus of film: the projector, the screen(s), the filmstrip, the projection beam and the 'primary' experience; the 'present tense' of the unique, one-off cinematic event[15] (Le Grice, quoted in Elwes, 2015, p. 165).

Le Grice's description of expanded cinema closely relates to my practice, analysed in Chapters Four and Five. Echoing Le Grice's sentiment, Knowles reflects that expanded cinema has come to be known as a 'live performance of experimental works' (2020, p. 187), where the material filmstrip and projector, along with the projectionist, become integral parts of the project. In my opinion, Le Grice's quote also speaks to the writings of Renan and Youngblood in their assertion that expanded cinema is largely a spirit of enquiry, comprised of expanded forms of consciousness rather than reduced to its materiality. I propose that through the intersection of installation practice and expanded cinema both spirit of enquiry and matter are foregrounded in the performativity of the materiality of analogue film. Knowles describes this intersection in terms of an installation-performance axis that defines photochemical film in the digital age (2020, p. 196).

[15] Malcolm Le Grice was speaking at the *Expanded Cinema: The Live Record* symposium, 6 December 2008, at the BFI Southbank, London.

To expand on this concept, I encourage the embodied participation of the viewer in the installation space, whereby 'both viewer and environment [are] regarded as material components of the work' (Elwes, 2015, p. 166) and crucial to the success of the artwork, thereby referring to Siegfried Kracauer who says that 'film images affect primarily the spectator's senses, engaging [her] physiologically before [s]he is in a position to respond intellectually' (1997, p. 158). As explained above, it is through affect that this physiological response is made possible, through the modality of embodied knowing. My installation practice draws on both ends of the binary views of expanded cinema, that of the expanded spirit of enquiry and the stripped-down version privileging materiality. The dialogue between the two originates from the immersive embodied participation of the audience, giving them a direct experience of the present moment, a moment of expanded consciousness through the materiality of the installation.

3.2 Artistic context

The live body and expanded cinema

Duncan White, in his essay 'Expanded Cinema: The Live Record', proposes that expanded cinema is often associated with 'liveness, "immediacy", an emphasis on "primary experience" and the directness of viewing' (2011, p. 26). In two of my artworks described in Chapters Four and Five, *Scratching Below the Surface* (2018) and *Pinch Point* (2019), I place my live body within the installation space. Both artworks illuminate the gendered nature of my enquiry. In *Scratching Below the Surface*, in particular, I perform in the throw of the projector in a similar way to Gill

Eatherley (*Aperture Sweep*, first performed in 1973) and Annabel Nicolson (*Reel Time*, first performed in 1971) in their 16mm film performances in the early 1970s.[16] Nicolson and Eatherley's use of their female body and tools that signify domestic labour, enacting what can be described as female-gendered domestic acts, provided a lens through which I could view my own practice, specifically the artworks *Scratching Below the Surface* (2018) and *What Lies Beneath* (2018).

Aperture Sweep (Figure 10) is a multiscreen performance where, on the left-hand screen, Eatherley appears as a silhouette in the beam of the projector with a broom, sweeping the film, while the right hand screen is clear and becomes the field of live activity where Eatherley sweeps the blank screen with a broom that is attached to a microphone. Her attention is focussed on sweeping towards the edge of the screen, thereby 'marking the gendered thresholds that often define the physical as well as the psychological boundary of the film image and the real situation of the films projection' (White, 2011, p. 34).

[16] Other structural filmmakers have also worked with the throw of the projector in performance, such as Malcolm Le Grice (*Horror Film,* 1971) and Guy Sherwin (*Paper Landscape,* 1975); however, in this instance, I am interested in women filmmakers.

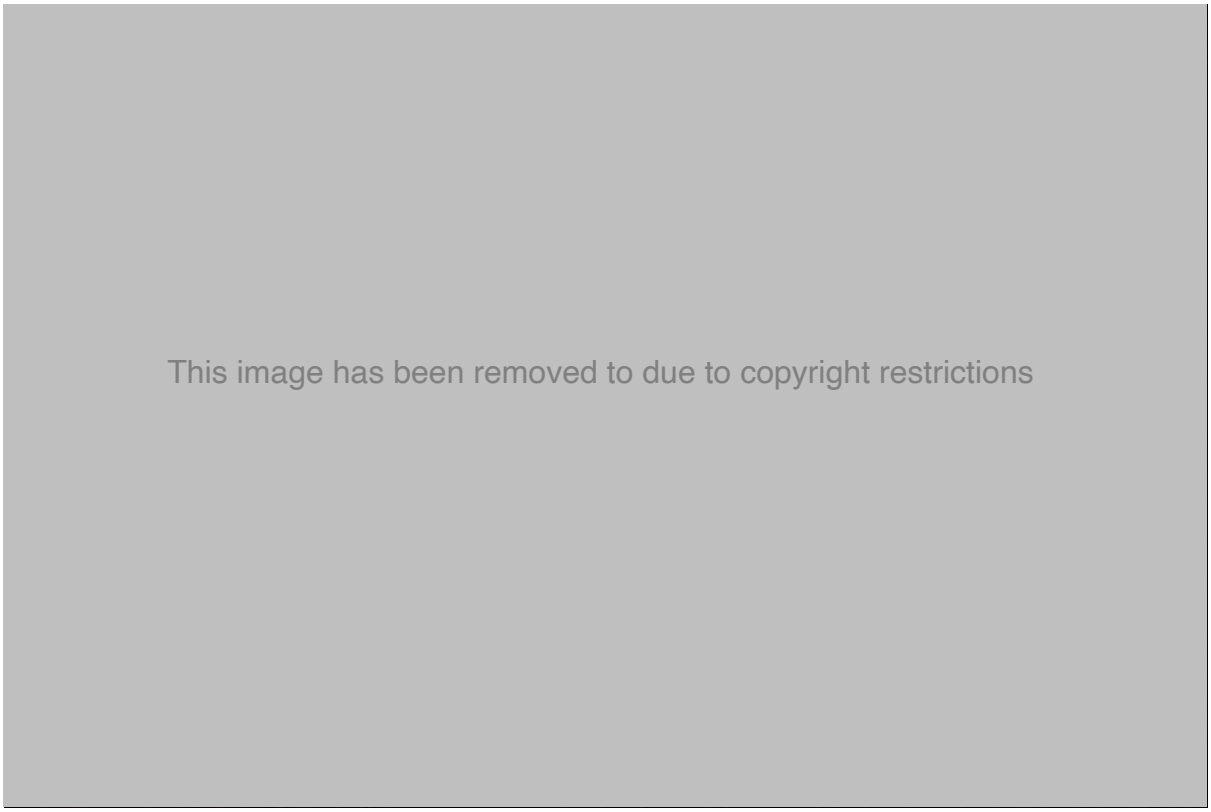


Figure 3. *Aperture Sweep* [16mm Performance] Gill Eatherley*,* performed at BEEF, 2019 as part of *Destroying the image of the female, Low Light, February 2019. Image: © BEEF*

In *Reel Time* (Figure 4), Nicolson is positioned at a table in front of a hand-sewing machine in the throw of a projector. She is visible as shadow on the screen, stitching film strips fed to her by the projector. There is no thread in the sewing machine. The film that Nicolson is *stitching* is of herself operating a sewing machine and can be seen on one screen as her shadow is seen on another (White, 2011, p. 27). In her essay, 'Annabel Nicolson: The Art of Light and Shadow', Felicity Sparrow reports that, as Nicolson stitches the film strip, 'the room is full of noise: the steady whirring of the projectors, the clacking and clicking of the filmstrip as it passes over pulleys and through the projector, the hum of the sewing machine' (2005). As she stitches,

the film begins to break down because of the repeated perforations made by the sewing machine, and if it snaps the projectionist splices the film back together again, while two members of the audience read the instructions to threading both a sewing machine and a projector (Sparrow, 2005). Both these machines represent inherent dualistic gender positions. The sewing machine is a symbol of women's labour in the home and the film projector, usually hidden from view in a box behind the audience, is operated by a male projectionist in Nicolson's film performance. As Sparrow states, this symbolises the vastly male dominated film industry in the early 1970s (2005). In *Scratching Below the Surface,* I draw a similar parallel, as in Eatherley's *Aperture Sweep* and Nicolson's *Reel Time*, with the dualistic gender positions of the film projector and the sewing tool that I use in the performance.

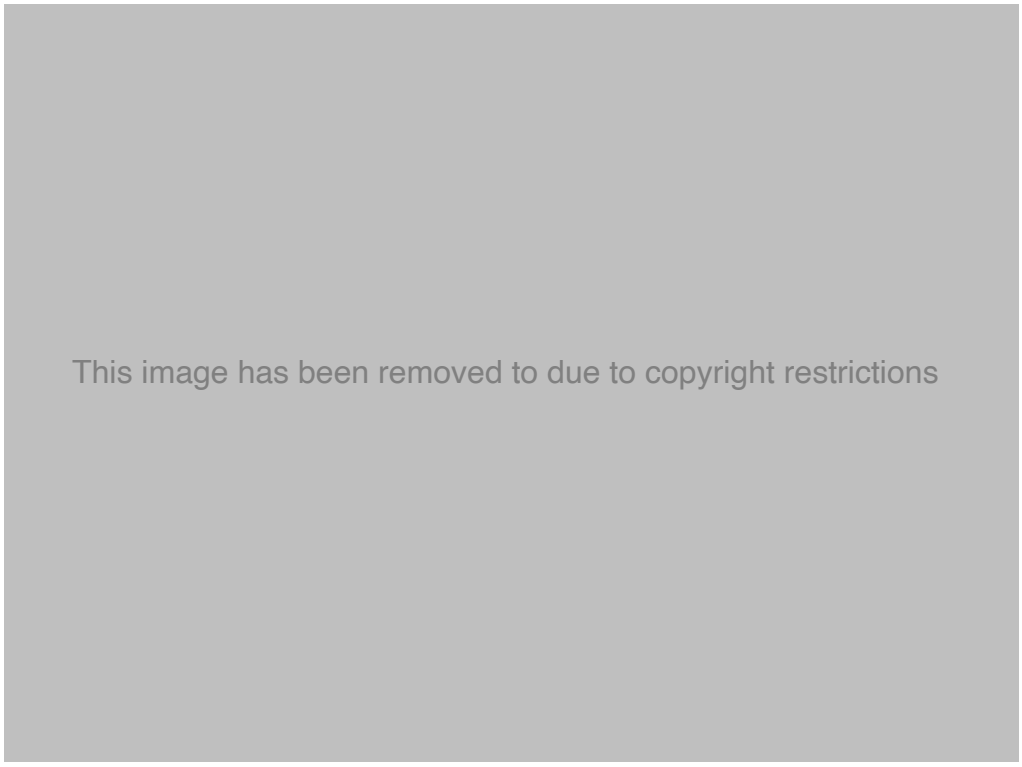


Figure 4. *Reel Time* [16mm Performance] Annabel Nicolson, 1972.
Image: © Luxonline

Analogue film as context

To situate my research within the context of the works of other artists using 16mm film, I now examine artworks made since the year 2000, that is, made since the decline of the 16mm analogue film in television and cinema. As such, they reflect the qualities associated with the materiality of the film in the context of specific artworks, each revealing different attributes that relate to my own research practice. I describe the artworks of four artists working with analogue film: Louisa Fairclough's *Bore Song* (2011), which expresses her lived experience of the loss of her sister; Vicky Smith's *Re:exposure* (2020), which articulates ideas around aging, aging skin and climate change; Naomi Uman's *Removed* (1999), which employs manipulated pornographic found footage to articulate the objectified female position; and Bradley Eros's *Burn (Or, the Second Law of Thermodynamics)* (2004), which also employs pornographic found footage and live performance by the artist, reflecting the male/female binary between the operator and the filmic performer.

Louisa Fairclough's **Bore Song** *(2011) – 16mm film loop with sound projected on float glass*

Fairclough explores her lived experience of the loss of her sister through suicide in *Bore Song*, which formed part of a larger body of work called *Ground Truth*, and was installed in the Danielle Arnaud Gallery in 2011. This artwork employs 16mm film installation to articulate Fairclough's grief and loss.

Bore Song (2011) is a suspended film loop that is projected onto a small chunk of float glass, Fairclough describes her experience of this work, on her website:

> At the edge of the river, a woman sings a single note at the point of the bore tide passing, her voice following the surge of water. In the gesture she performs, she marks my sister's last breath and my own attempt to throw my grief into the river. The tide carrying breath/voice to the river's source before it is pulled back out to sea (Fairclough, 2016).

Figure 5. Louisa Fairclough*, Bore Song 2011.* 16mm film loop with sound projected on float glass. Courtesy the artist, Danielle Arnaud and the Contemporary Art Society

Figure 6. Louisa Fairclough*, Bore Song 2011.* 16mm film loop with sound projected on float glass (detail). Courtesy the artist, Danielle Arnaud and the Contemporary Art Society

In this installation, Fairclough positions the image and the projector on the floor, with the loop rising through a pulley on the ceiling. This gives the audience a sense of out-of-reach-ness. To get closer to the image, the viewer must get down to floor level. There's the sound of one note, eerie and ringing as the Severn bore tide flows behind the woman singing the note. This note travels through the glass screen in the same way that the bore wave flows across the screen, and there is a strong resonance between sound and movement. Both are haunting, suggesting transience, of what can't be held onto, Fairclough's sister's last breath and the passing bore tide. In the quote above, Fairclough talks of wanting to throw her grief into the river. Her work thus articulates her lived experience of loss and absence, and the perceived impossibility of living with grief while not being able to 'throw' it into the river. Fairclough uses the materiality of 16mm film to echo the last breath of her sister, explaining: 'With film I attempt to describe distance, time and emotion in physical

terms: the filmstrip as a measurement of the time it takes for the bore tide to pass, the length of a breath and the weight of grief' (2011). Eros likewise marks the equivalence between the body and 16mm film when he writes that analogue film is 'conscious of its own mortality and celebrated for its precious existence of material vulnerability' (2012, p. 45). In *Bore Song*, Fairclough is using the analogue materiality, the film loop as it flows, like breath through the projector and the pulley on the ceiling, to echo her sister's last breath. The breathing projector, the breathing bore tide, the outbreath of the woman in the film, all echo this last breath and Fairclough's attempt at throwing her grief out of her body and into the body of River Severn. Fairclough's use of space in the installation, particularly the relationship between the projector, the film loop and the float glass 'screen' with the projected image, has informed my practice from the outset of this project. I employ film loops threaded through the ceiling in most of my work described in this thesis, and I have thought about the use of space in more diverse ways as a result of *Bore Song.* Fairclough's use of materiality to articulate her experience of loss revealed to me the ways that I can use 16mm film practice to articulate my own lived experience.

Vicky Smith's* Re:exposure *(2020) – 16mm, hand processed, black and white animation / live action, 10 minutes

Re:exposure (2020) was commissioned by the Arnolfini for their exhibition *A Picture of Health I Look at this skin… it keeps changing* (2021). It is a 10-minute 16mm, black and white hand processed film with animation and live action. The film is a 'reflection on exposure, and on change, of skin to sun and of film to light, and the

environmental, social and hereditary factors that impact the aging process' (Arnolfini, 2021). In this film, Smith intersperses close-up, high-contrast negative footage of her own skin, and other body parts, including teeth, eyes and eyebrows (Figure 7) with old footage of her and her mother on beaches during their holidays and footage of the films being looked at side-by-side on a lightbox (Figure 8), accompanied with narratives by both Smith and her mother. She describes how the footage of the skin textures 'filmed in extreme close up appear in single or short frame bursts, and accompanied by percussive sounds, create a fast-paced rhythmic journey around the surface of the body' (2021). *Re:exposure* creates an interesting dialogue between three interwoven narratives: that of the extreme close-up images of the aging body; the inter-relational narrative between Smith's subjective body and her mother's body on the beaches in the 1950s; and Smith and her mother's conversation about these images. In the film's voiceover, Smith discusses the exposure qualities of the film, while she and her mother converse about the quality of their skin as it is exposed to the sun. Thus, an inter-relational dialogue between the nature of photochemical film and skin as it is exposed to light is created, pointing to, in my view, notions of subjectivity and objectivity, and generated using the close-up imagery of the body and images of bodies on the beach on strips of film. This becomes especially clear when we see Smith looking at the footage of her own skin on a lightbox. In essence, the skin becomes three steps removed. I acknowledge that this isn't what Smith is attempting to articulate; rather I read the film in this way through the lens of my own practice research. Additionally, the method of filming her body, using single or short frame bursts, resonates with the way that I utilise similar footage for both *What Lies*

Beneath (examined in Chapter Four), and *Flesh[wound]* (explored in Chapter Five).

In Smith's words:

> The DIY analogue film processing method gives this material a burnt brown look, while the inclusion of 'mistakes', such as fogged and scratched sections, emphasize the sense of exposure and damage to skin and to film material (2020).

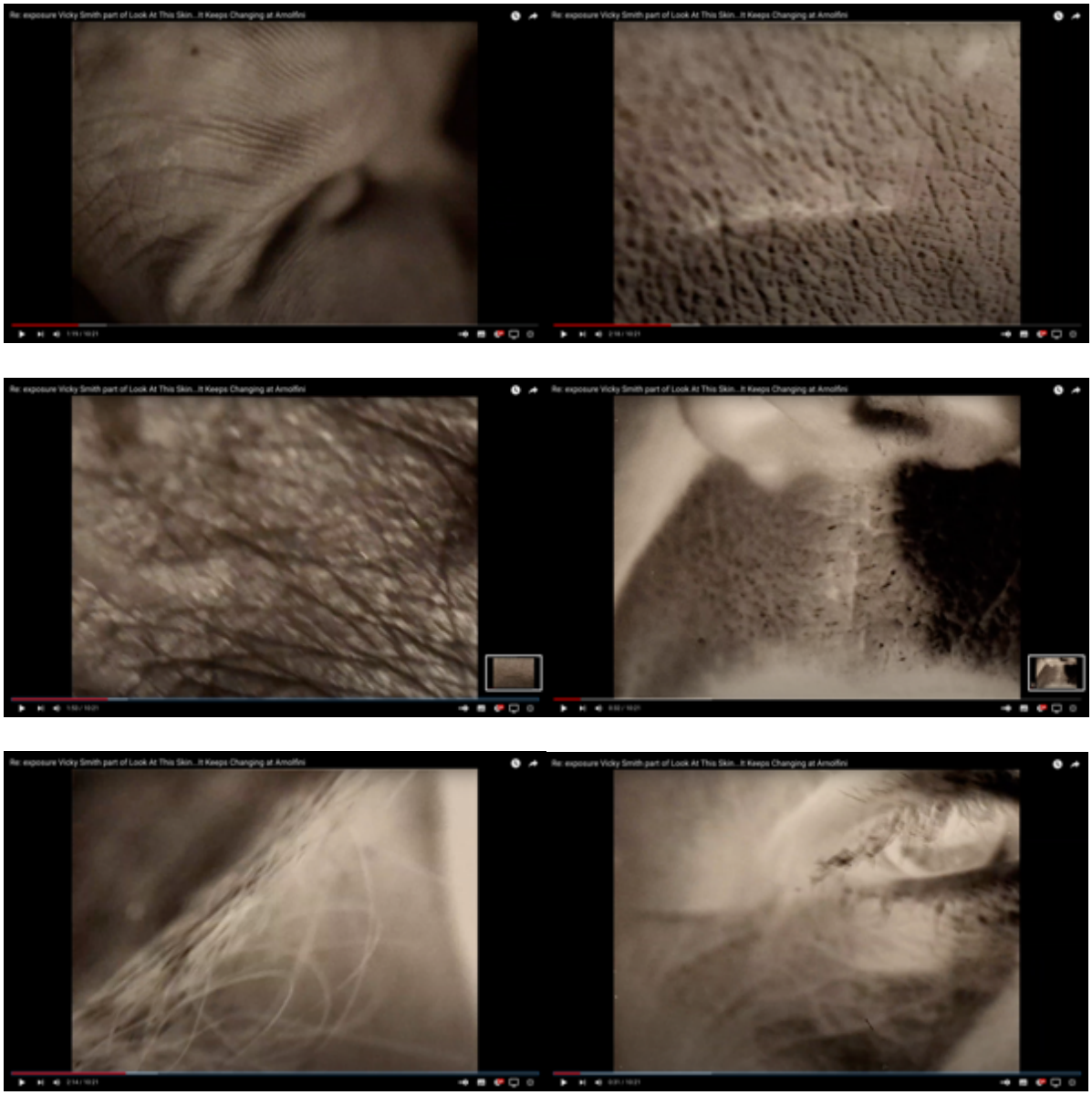


Figure 7. *Re-exposure* [animation/live action film] Vicky Smith, 2020, Stills of close-up skin, part of *Look at this skin…it keeps changing* [Exhibition]. Arnolfini, Bristol, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPbYpCfnRp4, (accessed: 1 August 2022).

As the film progresses, Smith and her mother together look at still negatives of her mother on the beach and they discuss how she would tan in the 1950s, using olive oil to help the process. The film ends with more close-up footage of Smith's own skin. That is to say, the film is bookended by her own subjective body, allowing a reflection of the nature of skin exposure, through a camera lens, through the sun and through the photochemistry of the film. In Chapter Five, I analyse further the nature and utility of photochemistry in my practice research project to articulate the equivalence of the cutting of my skin with emulsion flaws on the film, and the role of the skin as a boundary.

Figure 8. *Re-exposure* [animation/live action film] Vicky Smith, 2020, Stills of looking at film on lightbox part of *Look at this skin…it keeps changing* [Exhibition]. Arnolfini, Bristol, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPbYpCfnRp4, (accessed: 1 August 2022).

Naomi Uman's* Removed *(1999) – found footage, 6 minutes

Naomi Uman's *Removed* (1999) comprises two scenes from a 16mm German colour pornography film, from which she has removed the women's bodies, frame by frame, using nail varnish remover (Figure 9). 'I wanted to see what would happen if you remove the women [from the pornographic film]… would it still be pornography?' Uman questions. 'In an odd way the resulting film is far more erotic than the original' (Uman, quoted in Santiago, 2006). In an analysis of Uman's films, Ofer Eliaz draws on Claire Johnston's notion that in cinema, from the time of silent films, a woman's body appears as a sign of her own nonexistence, that the 'woman' is a screen for the male projection of his own lack (Eliaz, 2014, p. 213). However, in the treatment of the film by Uman, women's bodies become more present through their absence. In her article 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' (1975), Laura Mulvey discusses the nature of this absence in the context of what she describes as 'the patriarchal unconscious' (1975, p. 6). She claims that the paradox of phallocentrism is that it 'depends on the image of the castrated woman in order to give order and meaning to its world' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 6). In removing female bodies in this artwork, Uman accentuates this absence, therefore accentuating the paradox and, consequently, documenting 'her *real* place within the pornographic fiction' (Eliaz, 2014, p. 213). In *What Lies Beneath,* I use ink to obscure the woman in the footage, which rubs away as the film runs through the projector, revealing the woman's presence, rather than obscuring it. Both uses of found footage present the woman's body as a spectral image, either through obscuring or removal, pointing to a 'second location of the body, that of an absent figure that cannot be made visible' (Eliaz, 2014, p. 207) – in this case, the absent body belongs to the artist. Another absence is therefore

exposed, whereby the filmic bodies are signified by their erasure from the scene (Eliaz, 2014, p. 208).

Figure 9. Still from *Removed* [16mm film] Naomi Uman, 1999, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUlMDdIAe-g (accessed: 13 August 2022).

Bradley Eros's* Burn (Or, the Second Law of Thermodynamics) *(2004) – single-channel video from Super 8 film performance, 17 minutes and 20 seconds

In *Burn (Or, the Second Law of Thermodynamics)* (2004), Eros threads a Super 8 bondage pornographic film through a 16mm projector. The gate of a 16mm projector is wider than the width of an 8mm film, so when the film is manually thread frame-by-frame through the gate its passage is uneven, inconsistent and jerky, and some segments of the film rest in the gate for longer than they should, so that they melt and bubble until finally they burn in the heat of the projector lamp (Walley, 2011, p. 241). Figure 10 shows the progressive deterioration of the footage. The woman in the video is gagged, and her image slowly melts as time goes by and the footage is

manually pulled through the projector. I am struck by this act as it is carried out by a man, and it is the image of a woman that is being destroyed. I question whether Eros, as the performer and author of this piece, is destroying the act of pornography or the sexualised woman. Mulvey argues that the woman's lack of a phallus implies the threat of castration, which creates an anxiety in the male (1975, p. 21). This performance, therefore, could be read as a double devaluing of the woman, first through the initial footage where the woman is in bondage, and second through the destruction of the woman by feeding the film into the wrong projector. Mulvey describes the devaluation, or punishment, of the woman as one way to alleviate the 'castration anxiety' experienced by men (1975, p. 13). According to Mulvey, the second means through which the 'male unconscious' (1975, p. 13) can address this anxiety is denying the possibility of castration by turning the signifying figure into a fetish, thereby making her reassuring rather than threatening (1975, p. 21). Whist Eros's *Burn* can be said to enact the first strategy, the found footage utilised in my artworks *What Lies Beneath* (Chapter Four) and *Pinch Point* (Chapter Five) employ the second strategy.

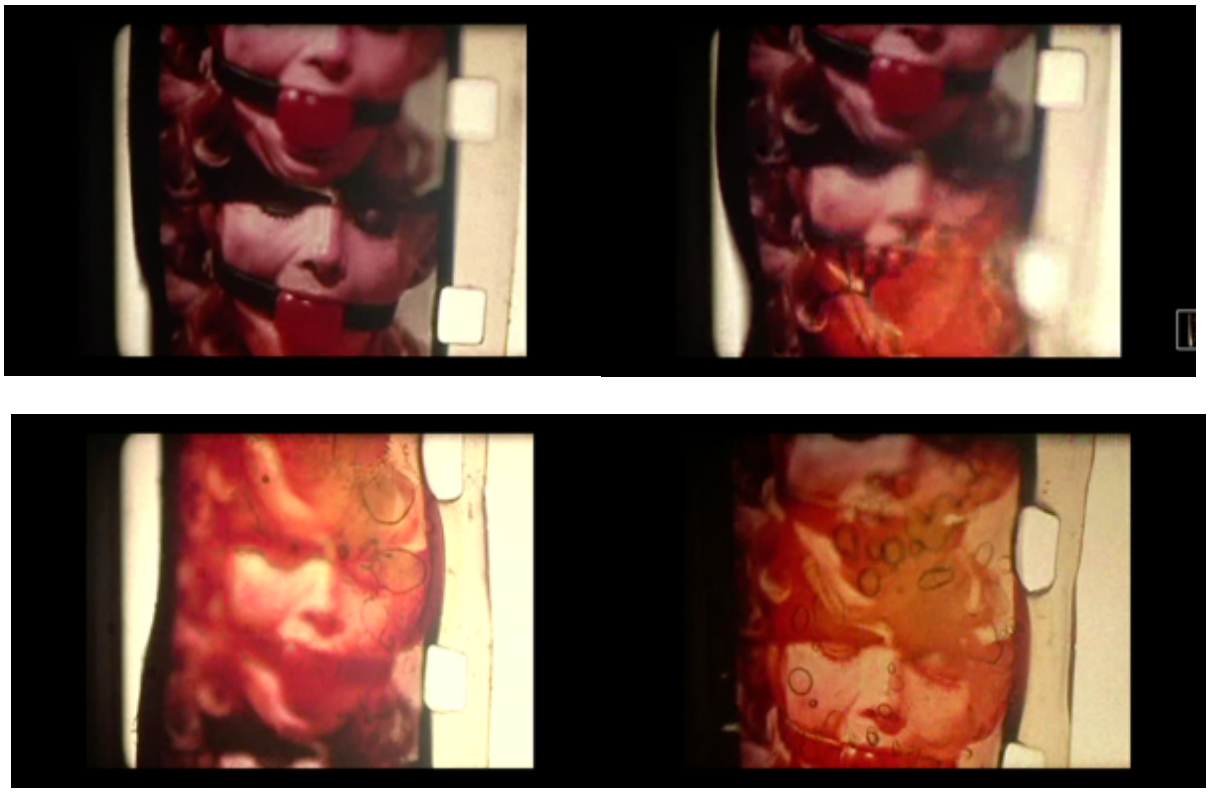


Figure 10. Stills from *Burn (Or, the Second Law of Thermodynamics)* [8mm film Performance], Bradley Eros, 2004, available at: https://microscopegallery.com/bradley-eros-art/, (accessed: 1st August, 2022)

3.3 Conclusion

Each of the artworks described above have informed my practice research in different ways. Fairclough's use of analogue materiality in her installation practice revealed to me the potential for expanding the projective environment beyond the classic cinematic screen, while privileging the materiality of the medium beyond the projected image. Her use of float glass as the projective surface, and the positioning of both the projector and the screen on the floor, make the audience phenomenologically aware of their position in the installation space. Conversely, Smith primarily employs the photochemical properties of 16mm film to exhibit the aging skin. She uses footage of her own body and footage of her mother as a young woman to demonstrate the relationship both women have with their skins. Paired with

the conversational voiceover, this draws the audience into an intimate space alongside both artist and parent. The artwork hence subtly draws on the notions of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject that my artworks articulate, particularly through the footage of the surface of Smith's body. Uman and Eros both use found pornographic footage to raise questions about the binary nature of the relationship between men and women in that industry. I use Mulvey to illustrate the implications of the absence of women in *Removed* and the devaluing of women in *Burn*. These artworks shed light on the way artists have articulated the objectification of women through the use of analogue film, and they reflect my use of found *glamour* footage in both *What Lies Beneath* and *Pinch Point.*

In the following chapters, I describe and analyse the artworks that I made during the life of this project in the context of my research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discovering the Body Through Phenomenology

4.1 Introduction

I now introduce my practice research through description and analysis of the installations *Scratching Below the Surface* (January, 2018) and *What Lies Beneath* (July, 2018). These artworks laid the groundwork for providing an answer to my primary research question on the ability of moving image, sound and performance art to reveal an understanding of the processes involved in self-injury. The artworks illustrate an embodied and theoretical perception of these processes and functions through installation practice.

In *Scratching Below the Surface*, I demonstrate the stages of self-injury in a three-room performance installation using sound, analogue film and digital projection. I offer a visual and embodied sensorial mapping of my experience by articulating the moments before, during and after self-injury. The artwork thus shows the ways that 16mm analogue art installation and performance can be key methods in revealing the relationship between dissociation, the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, and in communicating my own lived experience of self-injury to an audience.

What Lies Beneath builds on *Scratching Below the Surface* by illuminating the underpinning role of gender, particularly in regard to the experienced and objectified female body, in my experience of self-injury. Both installations have provided a solid

foundation for further research, leading to the creation of the artworks *…my beauty…*(2019), *Pinch Point* (2019) and *Flesh[wound]* (2019 and 2020).

What Lies Beneath and *Scratching Below the Surface* emerged directly out of my performative writing, as described in Chapter Two, which outlines important aspects of my lived experience of self-injury. As this writing has been so pivotal throughout the research process, I have included extracts from it to give the reader an embodied, poetic perspective of what each chapter articulates.

4.2 *Scratching Below the Surface* – performance installation (Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017, and Mills Bakery Studios, Royal William Yard, Plymouth, January 2018)

Scratching Below the Surface is a three-room installation utilising sound, 16mm film projector and loop, performance and digital video (Diagram 1). Following an excerpt from the relevant performative writing brought below in red, I describe each room and later analyse the installation as a whole. The extracts from audience feedback are based on sound recordings of the audience members' experience immediately after viewing the artwork.

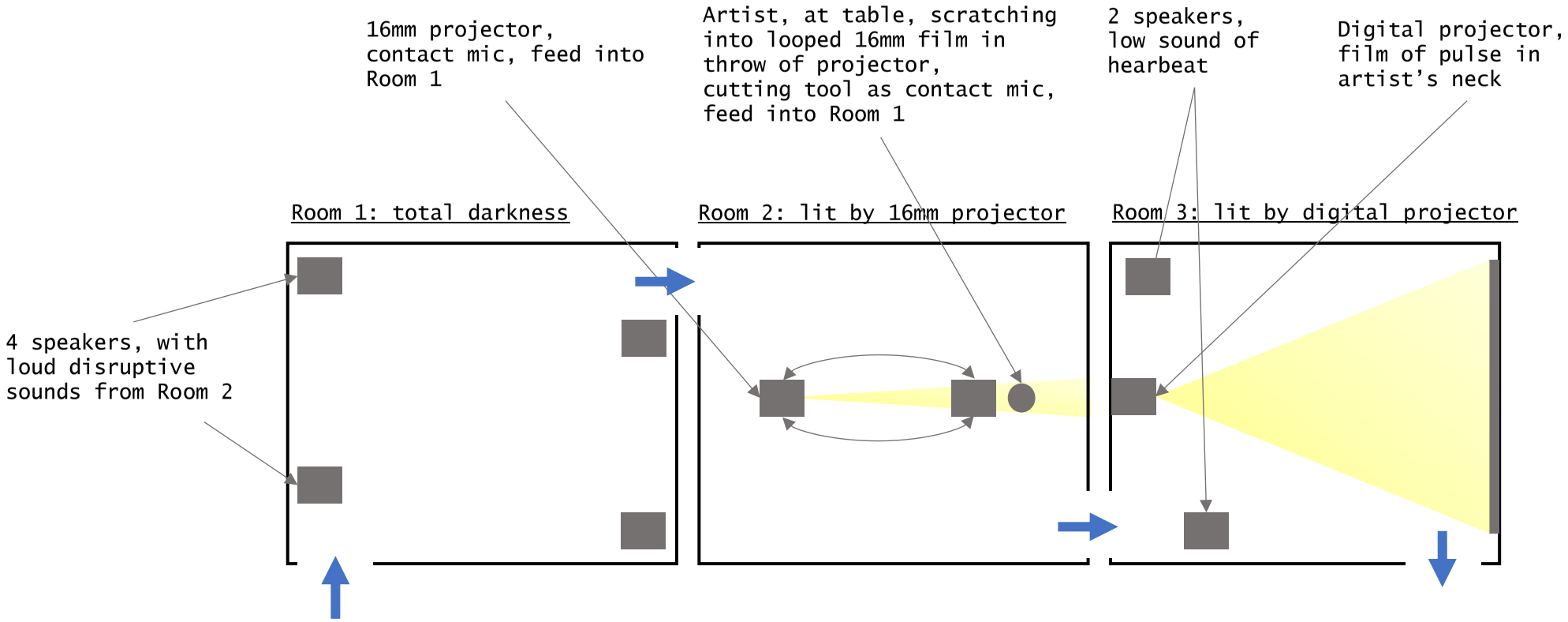


Figure 11. Plan for *Scratching Below the Surface,* 2017 and 2018.

Room 1

I melt, I become wallpaper

A deep sense of emptiness, a tragic emptiness, a sense of despair and pointlessness of isolation

Bleak and dark, a rage inside, a dark dark feeling of rage that wants to destroy itself

The sense of almost being the only person on the planet

I can feel it through my body, in my limbs, they are burning yet they feel empty

There is this wave of self-hatred, wave of utter abandoned isolating self-hatred, in my heart, dark dark horrible

Almost indescribable

Isolation

Hopelessness

An absolute total and utter implosion

Journal entry, October 2016

Room 1 is entered through a heavy black curtain. It is dark and about $3m^2$. The room is filled with sound coming from four speakers placed at each corner. The sound appears to bounce off the concrete floor and the walls (link: https://vimeo.com/744320123, pause at 00:46). Audience members mentioned that the darkness seemed to press into their eyes and the loud unidentifiable sound pressed into their bodies. The sound pierces the space from all directions, creating a sense of disorientation in the audiences' bodies. One audience member said:

> At first the sound made me laugh, it was funny, like these were the sounds of monsters, but then as I entered the space more fully, as I became immersed more fully in the sound, I felt overwhelmed, on the edge of fear (Anonymous, 2017).

Audience members reported that it wasn't easy for them to stay in this room, as the sounds and the darkness become intolerable, forcing them to move into the next

space through another heavy black curtain, made visible by the flashes of light appearing through the gaps in the fabric.

The first room represents my lived experience in the moments prior to self-injury, when I experience a complex and, apparently, paradoxical state that feels, as the journal entry above expresses, intolerable. My mind is flooded with intrusive thoughts, and the sensations in my body feel unendurable. This state can be defined clinically as dissociation, or sociologically as estrangement. These definitions suggest discrete experiences; however, I argue that what goes on is far more complex, because while I feel separate from my body, I am having strong emotions, experienced through my body, while paradoxically I can't feel corporeal sensations, such as the touch of my hand or the physicality of my body. It is, as the installation articulates, a loud unliveable cacophony from which I need to escape.

Room 2

It was the middle of the night. I took a glass from my kitchen. A thin glass, one which I knew would break into thin shards…. In my teenage days, I used tiny test tubes that I stole by the dozen from the chemistry lab at my college…. I took the glass upstairs to my bedroom, with a newspaper, wrapped the paper around it and gently stood on it until I felt the glass cracking under my foot. I unfolded the paper and felt my way through the shards with my fingers until I found the very piece which I knew, from experience, would do the job. I sat on the edge of my bed. I could feel my heart pumping in my ears and somehow time was compressed, as if at 48 I was no different from myself at the age of 16, while I gently caressed the soft skin of the inside of my right arm. At the same time, I was aware that a part of me was witnessing this act with a sense of alarm; perhaps it was the 48-year-old adult who should have known better. I took the sharp glass shard and pulled it over my skin. I could hear the sound of the glass scraping and dragging across the skin. I did this a few times, laid the glass down and checked the marks on my arm. There were some

old criteria, established when I was 16, that I was checking for. Are the cuts deep enough? Is there enough blood? Am I satisfied with these marks?

Journal entry, October 2016

Figure 12. *Scratching Below the Surface* 2017, [Performance Installation] Performance detail, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017.

On entering Room 2, the visitor sees me sitting at a table in the middle of the room (Figure 12, 14 and 15). Also in the room is a 16mm projector, with a film loop running through it and across and underneath the table I am sitting at, and back through the projector. I am holding a sewing unpicker[17] and scratching away the solid emulsion from the film (Figure 13).[18] The sewing unpicker is attached to a contact microphone

[17] This is a tool used by tailors and dressmakers to cut through the seam stitching.

[18] I exposed the film to direct sunlight and hand-developed it in caffenol, resulting in a solid dark grey surface impenetrable by light. Caffenol is a photochemical processing mixture that uses coffee, washing soda and vitamin C. It was developed by photojournalists in the Second World War when they ran out of professional developers. In recent years, it has become a very popular and successful method of developing film,

that picks up the sounds of the scratching as it travels through solid matter rather than air, therefore the resulting sound is raw and harsh (link: https://vimeo.com/744320123, play from 00:46 – 01:08). Another contact microphone is taped to the projector's heavy motor, picking up the constant and low mechanical hum of the motor along with any irregularities – such as joins in the film where it has broken, or tears in the sprocket holes that feed the film through the threading mechanism. These sounds are captured and, using a hidden sound mixer, are fed into the speakers in Room 1.

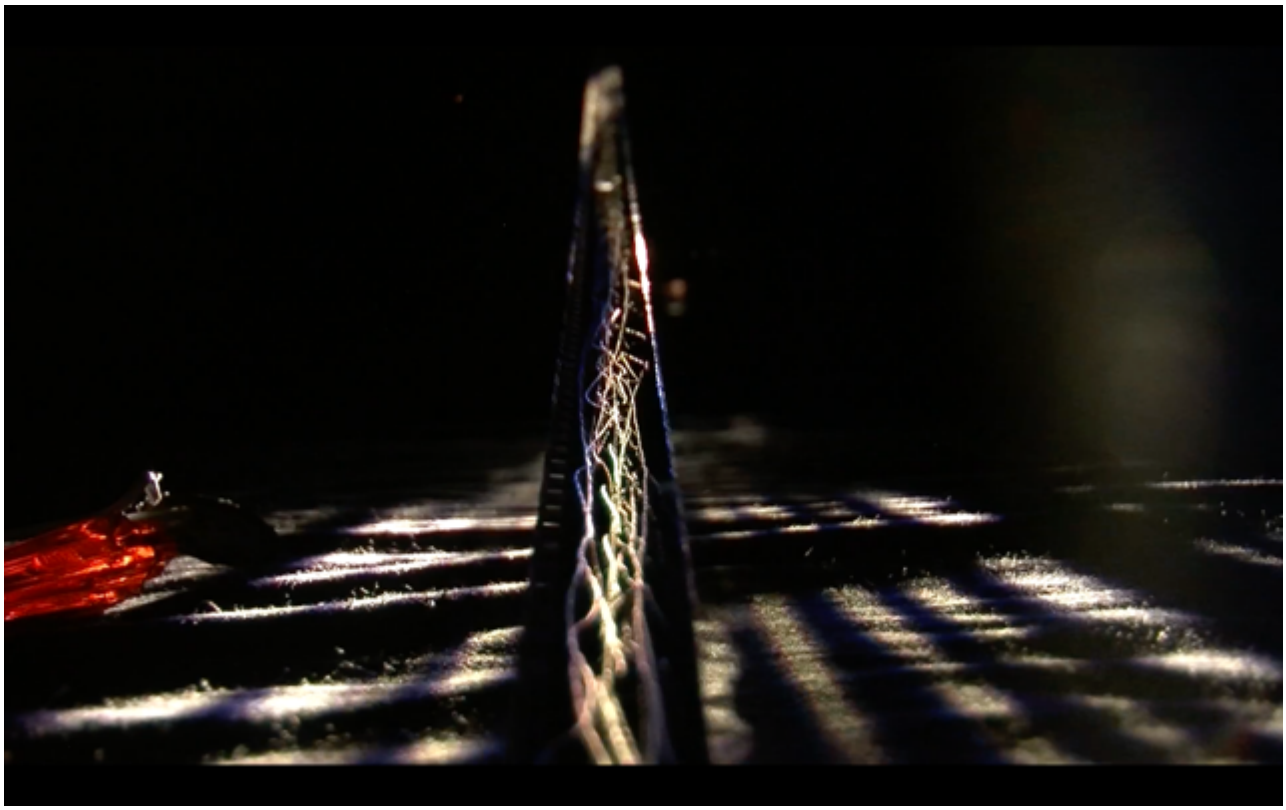


Figure 13. *Scratching Below the Surface*, scratches on the film strip during performance, performance installation, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017.

particularly as it isn't as toxic as the chemicals usually used for the purpose. I discuss the use of photochemical film in my research project in more detail later on.

At the beginning of the performance, I'm not visible because the film strip is solid black. As I scratch away the emulsion,[19] I am slowly revealed by sharp shards of light coming from the projector (Figures 15 - 17 and https://vimeo.com/744320123, play from 01:09 – 04:16). The viewer can see bright light flashing onto my hair, which falling in front of my face. I am focussed on the task of scratching the surface of the film. I only pause to sharpen the sewing unpicker or to resplice the film if it breaks and rethread it through the projector (Figures 18 and 19).

Soon, the audience realises that the sound they escaped from in Room 1 is produced by my scratching into the film and the heavy mechanics of the 16mm film projector. In this room, the sounds feel more distant, an echo of the previous harshness as it can be heard through the wall and curtains separating Room 2 from Room 1.

The audience reported that they were transfixed by the action in Room 2. Some described the experience as 'magical' and 'fairy tale like'. One audience member described their experience as follows: 'I was drawn into a compulsive place, from the audio, and from how you were working. You were in a very closed-down private place, as the performer, you weren't responding to us at all' (Anonymous, 2017).

[19] The light-sensitive photochemical coating the film surface.

There is an intense quality to what is happening in the second room. There is strong activity, but it is accompanied by a sense of order and focus. It has the feel of a ritual, or perhaps can be likened to one of those endless fairy tale tasks being carried out for no clear purpose.

Figure 14. *Scratching Below the Surface*, performance installation, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017.

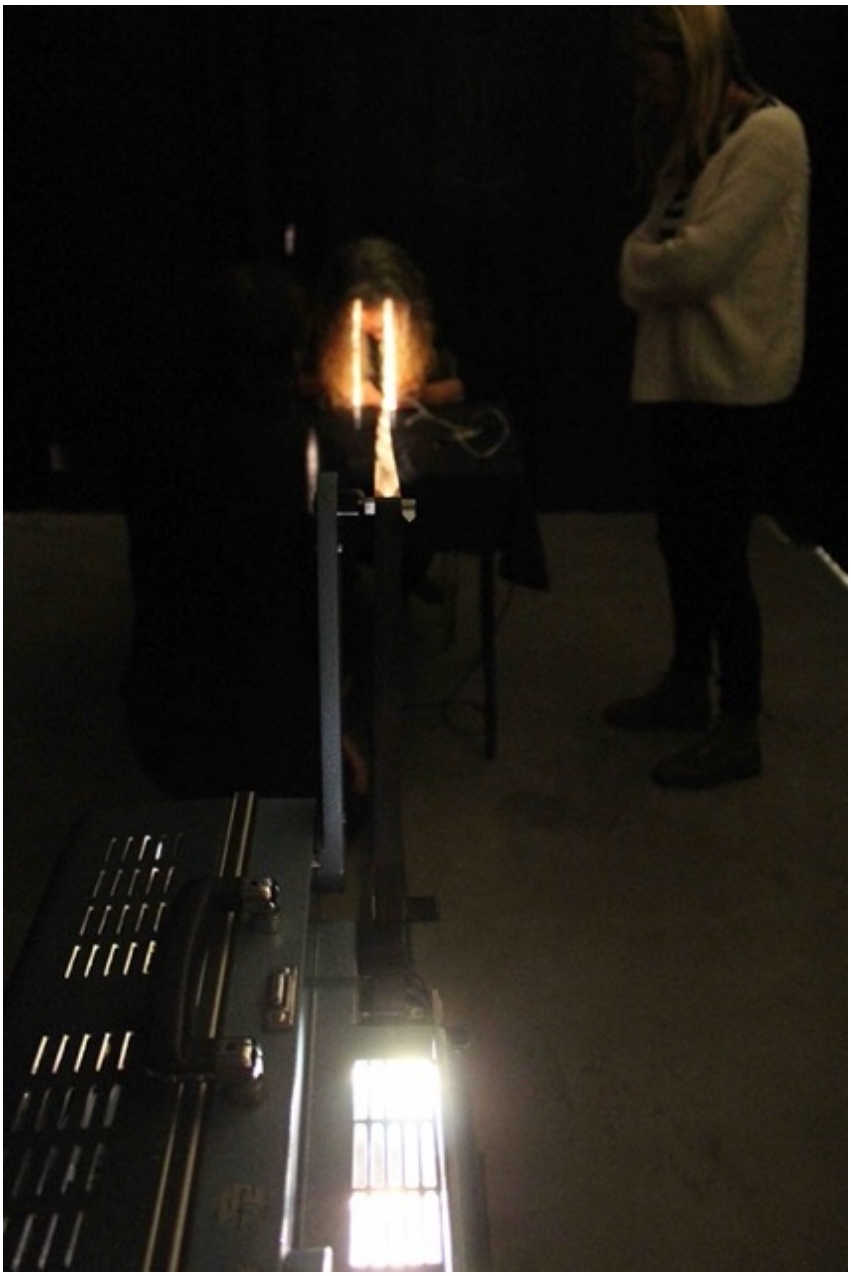


Figure 15. *Scratching Below the Surface*, performance installation, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017. Photo by Zanna Markillie.

Figure 16. *Scratching Below the Surface*, performance installation, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017. Photo by Zanna Markillie.

Figure 17. *Scratching Below the Surface*, performance installation, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017. Photo by Zanna Markillie.

Figure 18. *Scratching Below the Surface*, resplicing the film, performance installation, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017. Photo by Zanna Markillie.

Figure 19. *Scratching Below the Surface*, rethreading the projector, performance installation, Room 2, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017. Photo by Zanna Markillie.

The second room articulates the moment of self-injury. As I scratch into the surface of the film, light falls onto my hair, face and body, slowly bringing me into view, and thereby implying how in the act of cutting my skin I can feel myself more fully. The state that I am in prior to cutting, which is internally loud and chaotic, obscures my true sense of myself. By cutting my skin, I become visible to myself again. This act is complex, as it directly articulates my self as both an object that is being cut and a subject who is doing the cutting, while also pointing to the potential ritualised aspect of self-injury.

Room 3

Then, slowly, I could feel the pain melt through my body, I could feel a sense of tight distress, panic, desperation, and as the blood began to flow, so could the feelings move through my body, allowing great sobs to shake my body, and then a sense of relief and peace as I lay down to rest, quieter inside now. The witness was still there, shocked, judging my actions but quieter. It was done now. Sleep could come.

Journal entry, October 2016

The entrance to Room 3 is at the back of Room 2, behind me as I'm working at the table (Diagram 1). The room is again $3m^2$ with a projection on the wall opposite the audience as they enter (Figure 20, and https://vimeo.com/744320123, play from 01:08 - end). The video shows the pulse on my neck, accompanied by the sound of my heartbeat. One audience member remarked that this room felt relieving to be in after the previous two rooms. Audience members tend to rest here, to the sound of the heartbeat and the video of the pulse. One audience member said: 'It feels like a sanctuary after the nature of the first two rooms. Somewhere to be still, to let my body slow down' (Anonymous, 2018). The final room, as my journal entry above suggests, is where I can feel my truly embodied self again, where there is calm and a tender sense of the present moment. I can feel the surface of my skin through my touch. I can feel my experienced, subjective body.

Figure 20. *Scratching Below the Surface*, performance installation, Room 3, Studio 101, Roland Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth, September 2017. Photo by Zanna Markillie.

Analysis of **Scratching Below the Surface**

The audience enters Room 1, into darkness, where loud unknown sounds echo throughout the space. The sound from the contact microphones – connected to the projector and the sewing unpicker – in Room 2 is transmitted to the four speakers at each corner of Room 1 (Diagram 1). In Room 1, I use sound to expand perception, following Stephen Connor's assertion that listening 'restores us to a sense of being in the middle of the world' (2000, p. 15). Salomé Voegelin argues that listening is not so much a receptive mode but a method of exploration, a mode of 'walking through the soundscape/the sound work' (2010, p. 4). She maintains that what we hear is 'discovered not received' and 'this discovery is generative, a fantasy: always different

and subjective and continually, presently now' (2010, p. 4). I use sound in my installation practice in ways are intended to reverberate both in the environment and in the audience's bodies in order to increase their awareness of themselves and the surrounding space. Sound can disorientate or orientate a viewer within an environment depending on its nature, pitch, texture, volume and frequency.

In Room 1, the loud sounds of the scratching and the mechanical sounds of the projector coupled with the darkness of the space is intended to be an immersive environment. The sound, therefore, has the potential to cross the boundaries between inside and outside, reverberating in the audiences' bodies and bringing the audience into an awareness of their bodily sensations. In most cases, audience members reported wanting to leave the room as quickly as possible due to the discomfort in their bodies. I propose this creates an equivalent experience for the audience of my objectified, dissociated or estranged state. By equivalence, I refer to David Batchelor's definitions, where he claims that equivalence, as a 'ratio of likeness to unlikeness' (1966, p. 16), is 'a suggestion of a relationship […] above all an *invitation to look*' (1996, p. 17, author's emphasis). While audience members may not feel the same intensity of the objectified, dissociated or estranged state that I find myself in prior to self-injury, they are *invited* to feel a proximation to this experience. In my lived experience of self-injury, this is the state where my mind is overwhelmed by intrusive thoughts, and while I can't feel my natural bodily sensations, I can feel chaotic and frightening sensations that relate to these thoughts. This is a state that I feel that I *have* to escape from. In this artwork, as audience members reported, this experience leads them to move into Room 2.

The installation as a whole centres around the pivotal room – i.e., Room 2 – that articulates my lived experience of cutting my own skin. The moment of cutting presents me as both an object and a subject, as I am the one cutting and the one being cut. The artwork thus communicates the concepts of touching and being touched, sensing and being sensed, and ultimately the relationship between being the object and the subject that both Edmund Husserl, in *Ideas II*,[20] and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *The Visible and Invisible: Followed by Working Notes* (1968), grappled with through their phenomenological enquiries. Husserl makes the distinction between the two ways a body can be experienced, as *Körper*, a physical thing under an objectifying description or the outer perception of the physical body, and *Leib*, as subjectively lived or the inner experience of a lived body. Elizabeth A. Behnke provides a helpful summary and interpretation of Husserl's use of *Leib* and *Körper* in her essay, 'Edmund Husserl's Contribution to the Phenomenology of the Body in *Ideas II*', in *Issues in Husserl's Ideas II* (1996). According to Behnke, Husserl describes four sets of opposing attitudes, all of which relate to the theory of *Körper* and *Leib*. These attitudes can be described as frames of mind, and Husserl argues that the way we relate to the world and our bodies is shaped by the frame of mind we adopt (Behnke, 1996, p. 213). This is crucial to understanding *Scratching Below the Surface* and, indeed, all the practice research outcomes in this project as described in the following pages.

[20] The second volume of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1989), first drafted in 1912.

First, Husserl describes ‘naturalistic’ and ‘personalistic’ attitudes which reflect ‘the attitude of the natural sciences on the one hand and the attitude of the cultural or human sciences on the other’ (Behnke, 1996, p. 213). Second, he writes of the ‘naïve-dogmatic attitude’ that is not aware of itself as an attitude, ‘but simply takes what one experiences within this attitude to be “reality”’ (Behnke, 1996, p. 213). This contrasts with the phenomenological attitude within which one can see all the ‘attitudes’ and frames of mind at play in one person, and which gives us a greater understanding of any given attitude from within and ‘a rigorous awareness of which attitude is in play at any moment’ (Behnke, 1996, p. 214). Third, Husserl suggests that our relationship with our body can be distinguished as something between an ‘inner attitude’ and an ‘outer attitude’ and, finally, ‘body as constituted/body as constituting’(Behnke, 1996, p. 215)., which closely relates to the experience of the objective and subjective body. All these attitudes need to be considered in comprehending Husserl’s analysis of the body and his subsequent formulation of the concepts of *Körper* and *Leib*. Behnke explains how the distinction between the two can be understood

> in terms of the contrast between the immediate ‘inner consciousness’ of my own lived body, directly experienced by me as ‘mine,’ and the ‘outer perception’ of any physical thing whatsoever; in terms of the contrast between ‘someone’s’ body, i.e., the body of an existing, situated person, and ‘the’ body as the abstract, impersonal thing studied by such sciences as anatomy and physiology; or simply in terms of the contrast between the ‘body-subject’ and the ‘body as object’ (1996, p. 216).

The latter terms, *body-as-subject* and *body-as-object*, articulate the two states that I am representing in this artwork. Husserl’s description of the different types of attitudes provides the unexamined motivation behind these states, and indicates how

these states are personally situated, with the potential to change according to our attitude towards them. Indeed, the body can be directly experienced as either, and this installation reveals how this can happen through moving from one room to the other, from one action to the next.

As Diagram 1 explains, Room 1 in *Scratching Below the Surface* represents *Körper*, or the body as object, whereas Room 3 represents *Leib*, or the body as subject. Merleau-Ponty takes Husserl's phenomenology of the body further by analysing the relationship between the two states. He views the lived body as 'a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them', and describes this phenomenon as 'double-belongingness' (1968, p. 137). It is in Room 2 where, I suggest, Merleau-Ponty's notion of double-belongingness is realised. This room provides the meeting point of the body as object and the body as subject, and visually articulates the subtle interplay between touching and being touched. Merleau-Ponty explains how such double-belongingness 'reveals to us quite unexpected relations', between the subjective and the objective, because it 'forces us to give up any unambiguous distinction between them since "each calls for the other"' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, quoted in Folkmarson Kåll, 2009, p. 114). In Room 2, the film runs through the projector, presenting itself on the table in front of the light beam and in front of me, as the performer. I, the film and the projector together perform an interplay of objects and subjects, where one appears to *call for the other*. I have thus become part of the objective and subjective play, and the act of cutting becomes the imperative, a required action in this relationship.

In Room 2, as I scratch the surface of the film, I am made visible through the scrape marks, articulating a 'double sensation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 204), in the same way that self-injury does. I am cutting and I am being cut. Merleau-Ponty claims that this double sensation presents 'an ambiguous set-up' of alternating roles (1962, p. 93). In this case, and as Merleau-Ponty describes, cutting and being cut, or touching and being touched, never completely coincide, 'they flow over into one another, each having the same capacity, each being of the same flesh, of the same lived body' (Folkmarson Kåll, 2009, p. 115). Merleau-Ponty argues that the drawing together of touching and being touched 'at the same time takes away and holds at a distance, so that I touch myself only by escaping from myself' (1962, p. 408). As my performance shows, the threshold between sensing (or cutting) and being sensed (or cut) is 'not an ontological void', but 'spanned by the total being of my body' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 148). In my performance, the bridge that crosses cutting and being cut *makes me visible to the audience*. To put it another way, I become embodied; rather than having a body, *I am a body*. Renaud Barbaras suggests that this state reflects an incarnate sensibility that unites interiority and exteriority (2004, p. 154). I would describe this as a dynamic holism, whereby the sensing and the sensed can be in balance, creating a harmonic whole. *Scratching Below the Surface* expresses what happens, in my lived experience, when this balance is gone, when I dissociate and become an object in my own lived experience and choose to cut and be cut in order to return to my embodied self.

As the audience enters Room 3 through a heavy curtain, they see the video of my pulse in my neck projected on the wall directly ahead of them and hear the sounds of

a heartbeat, both the detail of the image and the sound of the heartbeat are quite subtle, and therefore might only become identifiable to the audience a few moments after entry. In my lived experience of self-injury, the post-cutting stage is where I feel a sense of relief, of peace, of deep relaxation, where I can feel the subtle sensations inside my body rather than having my attention fixed on my mind's intrusive thoughts. At this stage, I want to look after my body, heal the cuts, and take care of my emotional state that has been so strained and distressed. This room has the potential to facilitate a sense of embodiment within audiences, in the same way that the act of self-injury returns me to having a lived subjective experience of being in the world. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the body is 'our general medium for having a world' (1962, p. 146). Audience members have reported their experience of this room as being one that is peaceful, settled and embodied, where they could feel a sense of being centred in their bodies and, I suggest, centred in their experience of the world.

Scratching Below the Surface, reveals what happens in my lived experience of the three phases of self-injury. Audiences are invited to experience this work through their embodied sensorial lived experience, which, I propose, can help them to understand more fully each stage of my lived experience of self-injury, including the phase where I cut my own skin. Furthermore, this installation articulates the role of the objectified body and the experienced body throughout the three phases of self-injury, starting with the objectified body in Room 1 and culminating in the experienced body in Room 3. The act of scratching the film in the middle room points to a subtlety in embodied experience, where I cut, as the subject, and am cut, as the object. This makes a crucial foundation for further research, since such subtlety implies an

important pivotal moment in self-injury that needs to be examined more in response to my research question – that is, to what extent can moving image, sound and performance, in the context of art installation, reveal an embodied and theoretical understanding of the processes and functions of self-injury, and in what ways can art practice reveal new understandings of the lived experience of the body as object and the body as subject in the context of self-injury.

As described above, audience feedback points to the possibility of the ritualised nature of self-injury. The three rooms in the installation can be read as the three phases of a ritual, identified by Arnold van Gennep as pre-liminal (rites of separation), liminal (rites of transition) and post-liminal (rites of re-incorporation) (1960, p. 11). These phases could be mapped onto the three rooms of *Scratching Below the Surface.* Ronald L. Grimes, meanwhile, says of ritual that it is an 'embodied and social' act (2000, p. 4), and while my installation expresses the embodied nature of self-injury, the ritual itself remains private. Therefore, while there are some similarities, more of which emerge through the analysis of other artworks in Chapter Five, I find it misleading to label self-injury as a ritual.

Finally, because of the presence of the female performer, the sewing tool and heavy analogue machinery, a gendered binary becomes evident in my experience of self-injury. I realised, through the analysis of this artwork and my performative writing, that my act of self-injury is related to my tenuous, confusing and fragile, yet unavoidable relationship with the opposite gender. Reflecting on this installation, as

well as Nicolson's *Reel Time* and Eatherley's *Aperture Sweep* – examined in Chapter Three – it became clear to me that a gendered question was the necessary next step in my enquiry, along with further exploration of my relationship to the embodied subject and object in the context of self-injury.

4.3 *What Lies Beneath* – 16mm double projection with sound, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge School of Art, as part of the Theorem PhD exhibition, July 2018

When I began to self-injure, I was 15. I was (as I remember it now) not giving myself permission to experience sexual desire, or to allow the possibility that I might be sexually drawn to women rather than men. I felt very little agency as a young woman and I can remember following very closely the actions of my older sister (by two years) in how to dress, what music to like, what posters to put on my wall, which boys to 'fancy' – although even using this expression here reminds me of how spurious a concept it was to me then, a concept preordained from the outside, whose meaning I should be aware of and have a direct experience of. It was as though, because I didn't have the script, I emulated my sister. I inherited the script from her. I had very little sense of my own identity as either a teenager or a woman. I felt like I had no agency, that I was impotent, trapped inside someone else's view of who I am or should be. Although, again, on reflection, it can be argued that my agency was very acute. In the absence of any other guidance, I turned to my lifelong and trusted guide for help.

Journal entry, September 2017

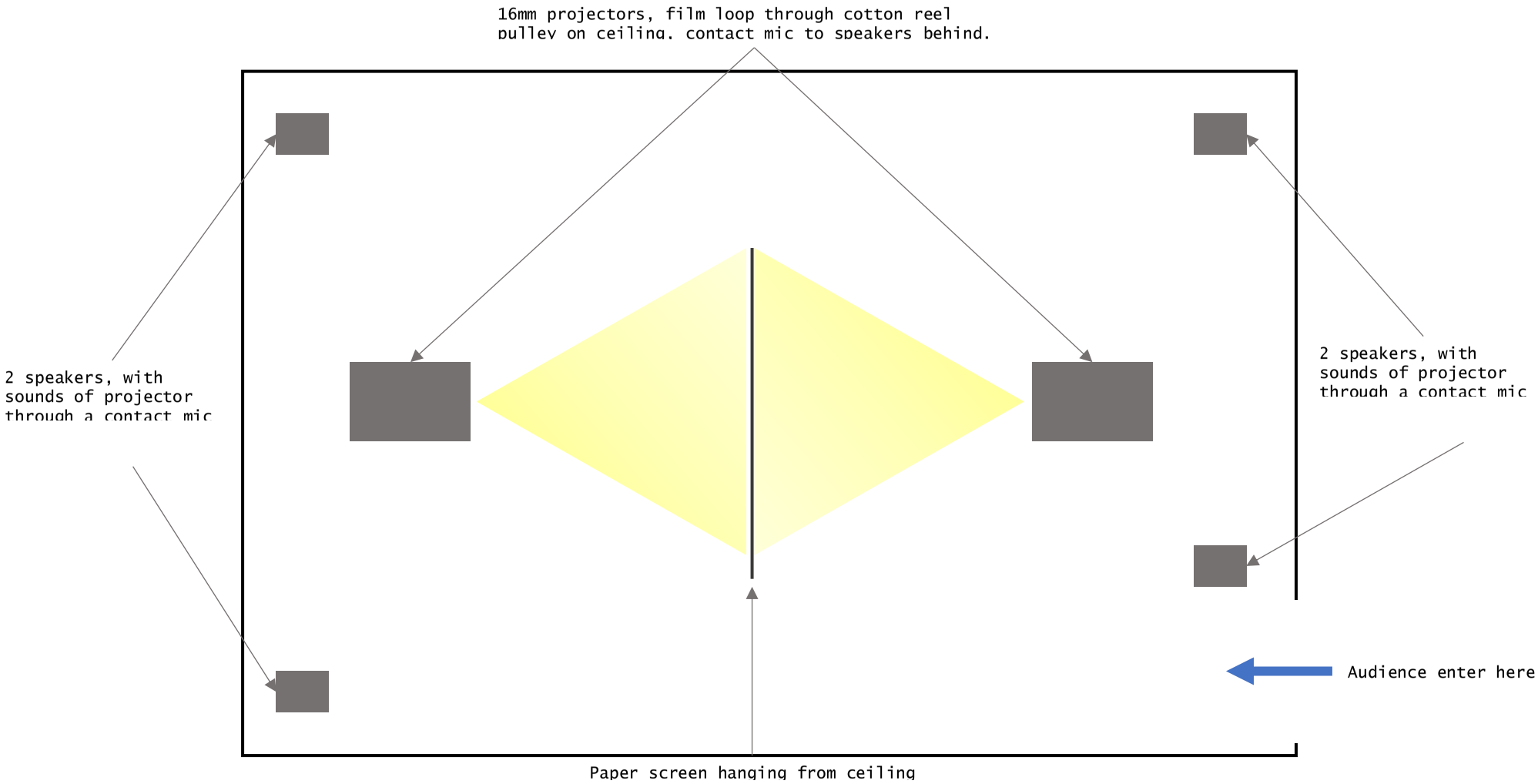


Figure 21. Plan of *What Lies Beneath*, 2018

This installation consists of a single room with the dimensions of about 6m x 6m, which is large enough to accommodate multiple viewers at a time (Figure 21). There are two 16mm film projectors facing towards the centre of the room, casting looped footage onto a roll of paper suspended from the ceiling (Figure 22). On one side of the room, facing the entrance, plays a loop of found footage, of a woman, dancing, gazing at the camera, but the image seems to be obscured by dark irregular lines running vertically across the screen (Figure 23). At first, these marks are darker but over time they fade, revealing the woman more fully. She is wearing a two-piece swimsuit and moves provocatively across the screen, her gaze fixed on the lens of the camera as she dances only to the sound of the projectors. (Link: https://vimeo.com/744953089)

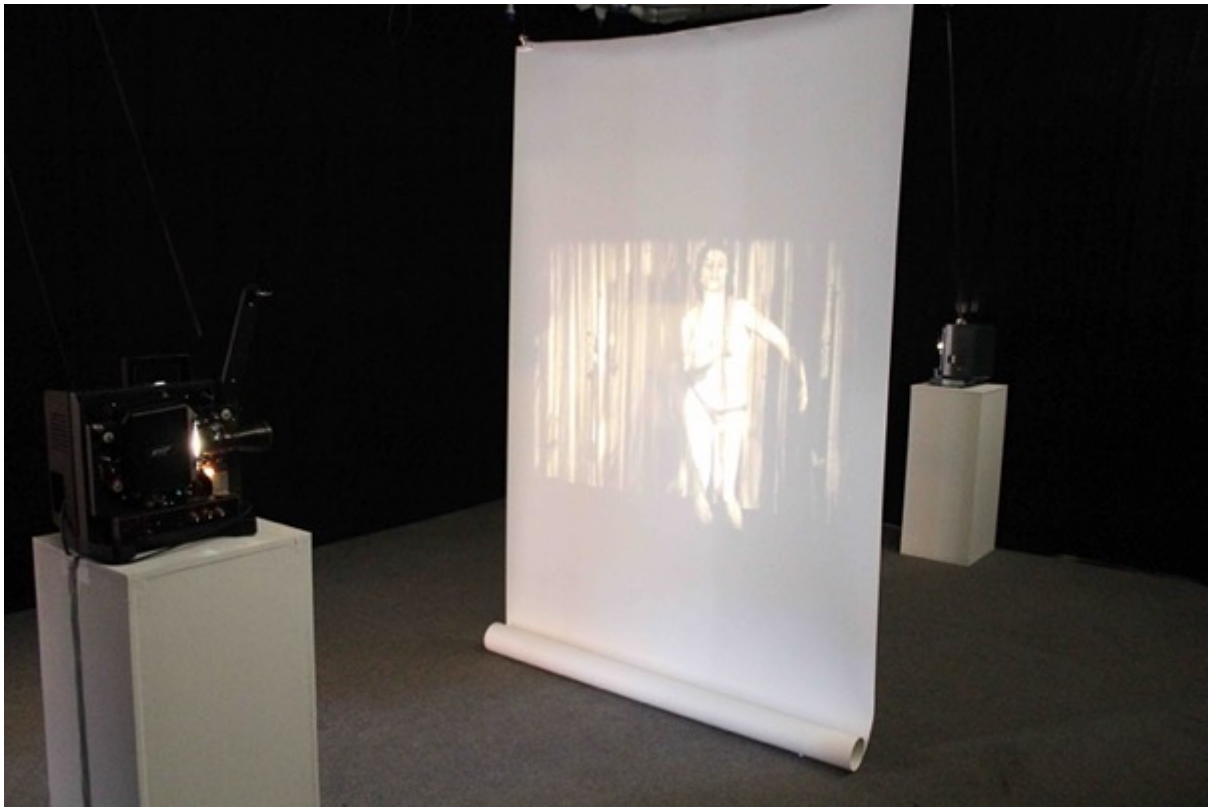


Figure 22. *What Lies Beneath*, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

Figure 23. *What Lies Beneath*, showing detail of ink on found footage, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

Figure 24. *What Lies Beneath*, double 16mm installation, still from found footage, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

The age of the found footage isn't clear, but the styles of dress, hair and make-up remind me of photographs of my mother from the 1950s and 1960s. I used this film because it demonstrated an objectified view of a woman, as she is dancing for the camera, and a male audience I suspect. In my lived experience of self-injury, as my journal entry at the start of this section articulates, I had a confused view of myself as teenaged girl, resulting in my resorting to outside views and objectified interpretations of expectations of me as a young woman. In this installation, the footage represents myself in the moments just before I cut my skin. As the darker lines obscuring the image begin to fade, as the ink is eroded by the film's movement through the projector and the reel on the ceiling, a different imagery becomes visible. It is of another body seeping through from the other side of the paper screen. This body is less clear. It is rather the suggestion of a body. The image in the footage is indistinct and zoomed on the body, making it hard to distinguish various parts. In some shots, the viewer can make out head hair, and in others, hands moving tenderly over skin and so on (Figures 25–27). Viewed from the other side of the paper screen, the projected image is clearer, more distinct, to the point that the pits and scratches of an imperfect film surface are visible. The image from the other side seeps through to this side. The two images meet and slide across each other, even as they move independently of each other. The second footage of the more subtle body is a close-up, 16mm footage of my own body that I filmed and developed myself. The flaws on the surface of the film, scratches and breaks in the emulsion, are visible when seen closely, marking the imperfections often detectable in hand-developed film. This footage articulates my body-as-subject, and how I feel more present in my own skin after I cut myself (Figures 23, 25 - 27).

The paper screen in the middle of the room is made of a roll of heavy drawing paper that is hung from the ceiling, the use of which creates a sharp edge like a cut in the skin. Its presence in the space ensures that the audience move from one side to the other and, as they do so, see a fine sharp edge, which I intend to suggest the edge of a knife or blade, a cut in space.

The sound filling the room consists of amplified projector sounds, the mechanical sounds but also a thudding sound that can be interpreted as the sound of a heartbeat. Through an in-built microphone, the first projector is plugged into a sound card which is fed into speakers in the rear two corners of the room. Because the film has no optical strip,[21] the microphone picks up the noise associated with the text that is written on the edge of the 16mm film loop. The text reads 'Kodak Safety Film' and is positioned every few feet on the film, making a regular *heartbeat* sound. The film is looped through projectors up into the ceiling, through vintage cotton reels, which reflect the age of the found footage and symbolise the gendered nature of the installation in a similar way that Nicolson's use of the sewing machine does (Figure 28).

[21] The optical track runs alongside the frames of the film, opposite the sprocket holes. It is essentially a picture of the complex waveforms that comprise the soundtrack which the projector decodes or reads and plays out of the speakers.

Figure 25. *What Lies Beneath*, detail of experienced body through found footage, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

Figure 26. *What Lies Beneath*, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

Figure 27. *What Lies Beneath*, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

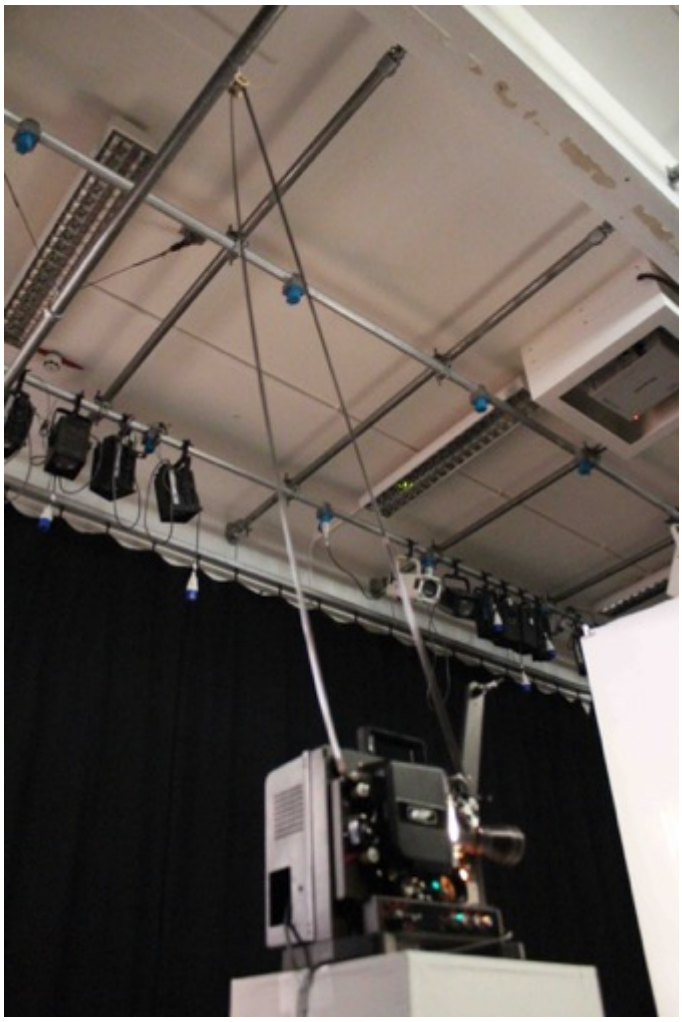


Figure 28. *What Lies Beneath*, detail of looped film, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

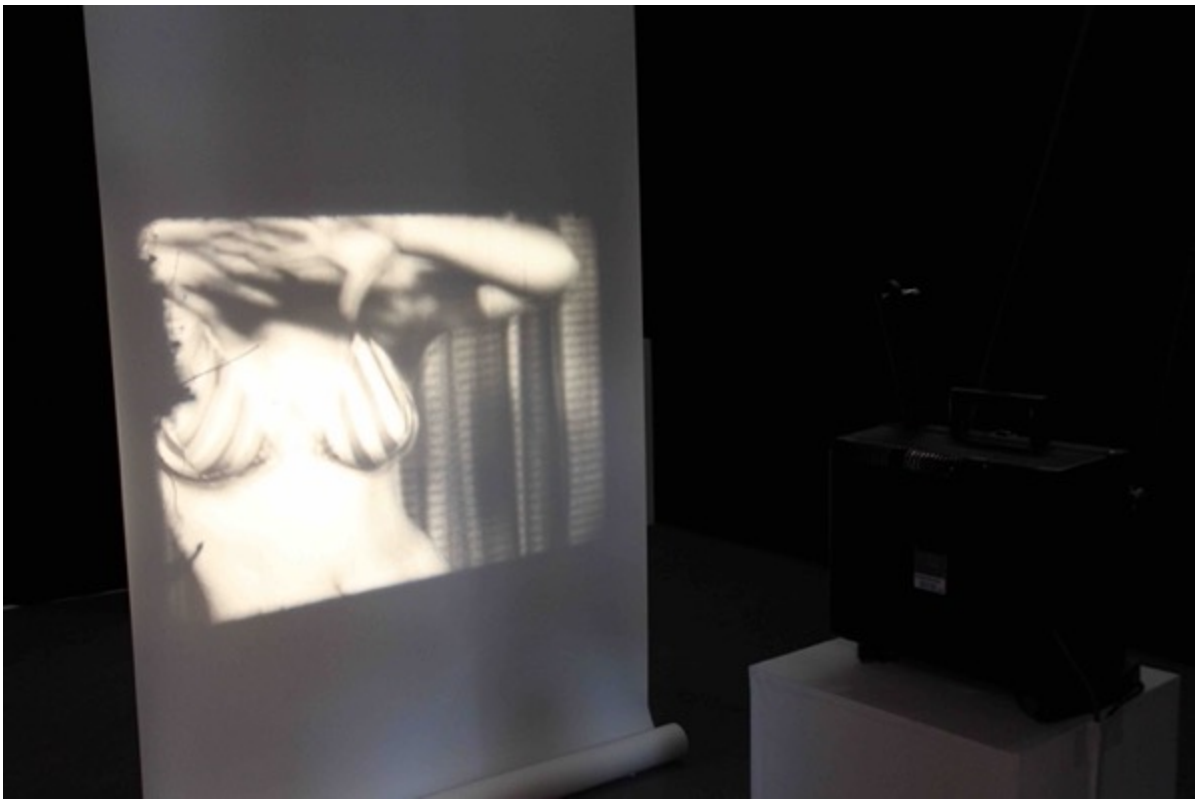


Figure 29. *What Lies Beneath*, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

Figure 30. *What Lies Beneath*, double 16mm installation, Theorem, Anglia Ruskin Gallery, July 2018.

Analysis of What Lies Beneath

The three key themes relevant to my research that emerged from this body of work are: 1) the ways in which film footage can point to deeper insights into the ideas of the female body-as-subject and the female body-as-object; 2) the role of the materiality of the analogue media being used in the installation; and, 3) the impact of installation practice on audiences through *affect*.

Female body-as-object and body-as-subject

The image of the dancing woman is slowly revealed from behind what appears to be vertical, ink-stained scratches across the screen (Figure 23). At first, the scratches obscure the woman and, as the film loop runs through the projector, they slowly fade, letting the dancing woman to come more clearly into view. In my opinion, she is dancing before a male gaze. Here I refer to Laura Mulvey's use of the term:

> The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* …She holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire (1973, p. 19, emphasis in original).

The footage I use exemplifies Mulvey's statement. As she holds the gaze of the camera, never wavering from the lens as she moves, sensuously across the screen, it appears as though the woman is not only appealing to the male gaze but playing with her audience, almost taunting them. In this artwork, she represents the objectified woman that lies behind my self-injuring behaviour. The installation thus articulates how we, as women, are programmed to be under the male gaze, a

condition which we then turn on ourselves, resulting in us existing before our own self-objectifying gaze. In her book on self-injury, *Writing on the Body? Thinking Through Gendered Embodiment and Marked Flesh* (2007), Kay Inckle argues that in Western cultures 'there is a constant association of the [woman] with the body: so that while a man has a body, which he may transcend: a woman is her body' (2007, p. 89). This means that 'the whole nature of women's relationship to their bodies is gender specific' (Inckle, 2007, p. 89). As such, 'gender is played out upon the body which is already marked as Other – female – through the norms of femininity' (Inkle, 2007, p. 92). These norms intensify the process of self-objectification by creating a 'sense of the self as object' (Inckle, 2007, p. 93). The result is that women develop a strongly objectified relationship with their bodies, as bodies. The found footage used in this installation exhibits both our internalised, objectified gaze as women, as well as the external male gaze. This manner of self-objectification has been directly linked to the occurrence of self-injury (Erchull, Liss and Lichiello, 2013), which is particularly evident if the norms of femininity that are projected onto a woman are dissonant with her own experience of being in her body.

When images of my own body are projected onto the other side of the paper screen from a second 16mm projector and film loop, my lived experienced of my body is portrayed. Employing my embodied consciousness movement practice – described in Chapter Two – I burrow below my experience of the objectified body into a sense of interiority, my internal sense of my own substance, my own immanence. This imagery barely moves, just a slow movement of my hand or my head, with my hair falling across my face, and the lines, tones and form appear soft and slightly out of

focus. As the two images bleed into each other from one side of the screen to the other, sometimes it seems as though a hand is caressing a breast or a belly (Figures 25 - 27). It appears on the screen as though an intimacy exists between the two, that they cannot be separated. The interrelationship between object and subject here is not a direct binary; it is a subtle and complex dynamic.

Materiality of analogue film installation

The second theme that emerges through *What Lies Beneath* is the materiality of 16mm analogue film. In this installation, the air is heavy, dense with materiality, with the sound echoing the matter, and the noisy, clunky and undeniably physical bodies of machinery inhabiting the space. Walking around in this space allows the audience to feel this density even more as they step through the darkness to the other side of the central screen. Due to its age and date of origin, the machinery in this space has the potential to prompt a sense of memory, of history, or perhaps a sense of timelessness. The objects in the space generate sound amplified by the speakers via contact microphones, movement of the film as it moves through the projector and cotton reels on the ceiling, and the vibration of the projectors. This matter is not inert; it acts within the installation environment, on itself, on other matters and on the human presences. The projectors, film strip and other objects can be described as having agency within the installation. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Jane Bennet draws our attention to the 'agentic contributions of nonhuman forces (operating in nature, in the human body, and in human artifacts)' (2010, p. xvii). In my artwork, this materiality is amplified as the machinery is linked up to four speakers in each corner of the room to create a loud multidimensional sound, giving

a sense of immersion, and thus further confronting the audience's feeling of embodiment. Photochemical film practice can likewise be understood in the context of the 'material turn' expressed by Bennett (Knowles, 2020, p. 17), and *What Lies Beneath* can be analysed through this lens. The material turn represents the shift in ideas from a mainly discursive enquiry to a material enquiry, foregrounded by writers such as Bennett in the book mentioned above and Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007). Analysing my art practice in this context generated new ways of understanding my research, which I expand on in Chapter Five. I suggest the materiality of analogue film, from the projectors to the film that runs through the projectors, creates a strong embodied presence in the installation space. While Bennett allows for 'a bit of anthropomorphism – the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature – to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world' (2010, p. xvii), in my research, anthropomorphism points to the corporeal relationship with the materiality of film where, for example, it is possible to create equivalence between the emulsion of the film and the surface of the skin. The composition and use of photochemical film facilitate this equivalence.

Affect and the audience

Finally, this artwork revealed some important knowledge with regards to how audiences are impacted by my immersive haptic installation practice. As described in Chapter 3, a fundamental part of my enquiry is how I can articulate to audiences the lived experience of self-injury through immersive haptic installation. Audiences who visit my installations are invited to *feel* the work through their bodies, as far as is ever

possible for reasons described in Chapter 3 on pages 96 - 98, as an equivalence to those feelings I experience throughout the processes of self-injuring. This is transmitted through *affect*. Affect occurs in a pre-personal, autonomous and non-intentional manner, and it is a force that exceeds the psychological subject (Massumi, 2002). As Simon O'Sullivan says, affects are 'what make up life, and art... affects are... the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification… You cannot read affects, you can only experience them' (2001, p. 126). Some audience members, when viewing *What Lies Beneath*, described the installation as 'tame'. These viewers explained that they were referring to the found footage of the woman dancing. On reflection, I realise that, because the footage is a representational image, the affective impact of the installation is reduced when viewers create their own meanings and interpretations. In fact, when it is registered by the human subject, Lisa Blackman suggests, affect is often closed down or arrested in some way. In other words, affect bypasses cognition and is experienced before it is translated into emotion or feeling (Blackman, 2012, pp. 21-24). In *What Lies Beneath*, because the footage is clearly of a woman from a specific time, dancing in a specific way and staring at the camera, audiences can easily watch the footage through the lens of their own preconceptions, thereby halting the primary affective impact. This became a crucial revelation in my research project, and going forward into further investigation I took care to bear the pre-subjective nature of affect in mind in order to create maximum impact for the audience.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the initial installations that laid the theoretical and artistic practice foundation for revealing the answers to my research questions. By working through a 16mm film and performance installation practice, I exposed the three key phases of self-injury – before, during and after cutting – and articulated ways through which the philosophical theories of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, and the clinical theory of dissociation, can be mapped onto my lived experience of self-injury. Importantly, for this research, the three phases have been revealed through art practice. Furthermore, the importance of the gendered body in my lived experience of self-injury was uncovered as a critical factor concerning my research question. Finally, I have been able to understand the affective processes at play for an audience experiencing haptic immersive installation.

Scratching Below the Surface and *What Lies Beneath* helped me develop my methodology and allowed me to locate the philosophical theories and artistic contexts that would direct the rest of my practice research, centring around the notion of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject and finding new ways of understanding self-injury in the context of embodiment. Furthermore, these two artworks demonstrate the important ways through which installation practice can be employed to reveal understandings around mental health and the body.

The following chapter explores in depth the final three works, *…my beauty…* (2019), *PinchPoint* (2019) and *Flesh[wound*] (2019), leading to clear and new understandings of the act of self-injury and the capacity of 16mm installation practice to reveal this knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

Blurring the Binary

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents my artworks *…my beauty…* (2019), *Pinch Point* (2018 and 2019) and *Flesh[wound]* (2019 and 2020), all of which employ different 16mm film and installation methods to express my understanding of the embodied experience pertaining to the act of cutting my skin. While the installations *Scratching Below the Surface* and *What Lies Beneath* (described in Chapter Four) explored the three phases of before, during and after self-injury, along with the gendered nature of self-injury in my lived experience, my research revealed a significant gap of understanding concerning the middle phase. It highlighted a lack of clarity about the processes at play and how my lived experience of the body-as-object transitions to the body-as-subject. In this chapter, I examine the artworks that specifically focus on this gap, seeking to reveal what happens in the moment of the cut, while drawing conclusions that resist the notion of a binary state with respect to self-injury as well as the corresponding and perpetual socially conditioned body/mind binary. Consequently, this chapter offers a greater depth of knowledge about the embodied states inherent in self-injury, particularly in the context of my research question which investigates the ways art practice can unearth new perceptions of the lived experience of dissociation and body objectification that lead to self-injury, and of the experienced body in the moment of and after self-injury.

The installation *…my beauty…* uses a digitally edited 16mm film of my body and the tool that I used to utilise for cutting my skin. The artwork employs the photochemical properties of 16mm film in order to create an equivalence between the emulsion of film and my own skin. It shows the role of the skin in self-injury as a boundary between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, and the moment of the cut which represents the transition between these two states.

Pinch Point is a performance installation that utilises found footage and my live body to articulate the gendered nature of the transition from the body-as-object to the body-as-subject. I analyse the ways through which the duality of the performers – the woman in the found footage and my live presence – further articulates the relationship between both states and how the violence of the cut returns me to an 'embodied selfhood' (Folkmarson Käll, 2009, p. 125) or a sense of 'me-ness' (Slatman, 2014, p. 72).

Flesh[wound] is a 16mm film installation that goes beyond self-injury as a method for returning to the body-as-subject, exploring through embodiment the relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject as they navigate a physical space. It investigates the supposed binary nature of the two states and demonstrates how this binary is in fact a leaky, messy and indistinct transition that can be experienced directly through the audience members' bodies.

I describe and analyse each artwork in the following three sub-sections. Finally, in the conclusion to the chapter, I summarise what each artwork represents in the context of my research questions.

5.2 *…my beauty…*– single channel digital projection with sound, Under, KARST Gallery, part of Plymouth Art Weekender, September 2019

Figure 31. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, September, 2019 Film Still

Unfolding the paper containing the blade, so familiar, yet forgotten until this moment. My fingers gently unwrapping each flap of paper. They pack these blades in such pleasing packages. I find a strange pleasure in the act of slowly opening the delicate envelope. A moment of pause, as I see the blade sitting in the folds of paper – my physical and emotional responses are mixed. I can feel a frisson, a rush of energy flooding through my body. It feels exciting and scary all at once. My heart beats a little faster, my fingers tingle, my stomach tightens. I feel alive as I gently navigate

removing the sliver of steel from its nest. It's a delightfully alive sensation. Me, here, with this blade. A profoundly beautiful moment.

Journal entry, June 2019

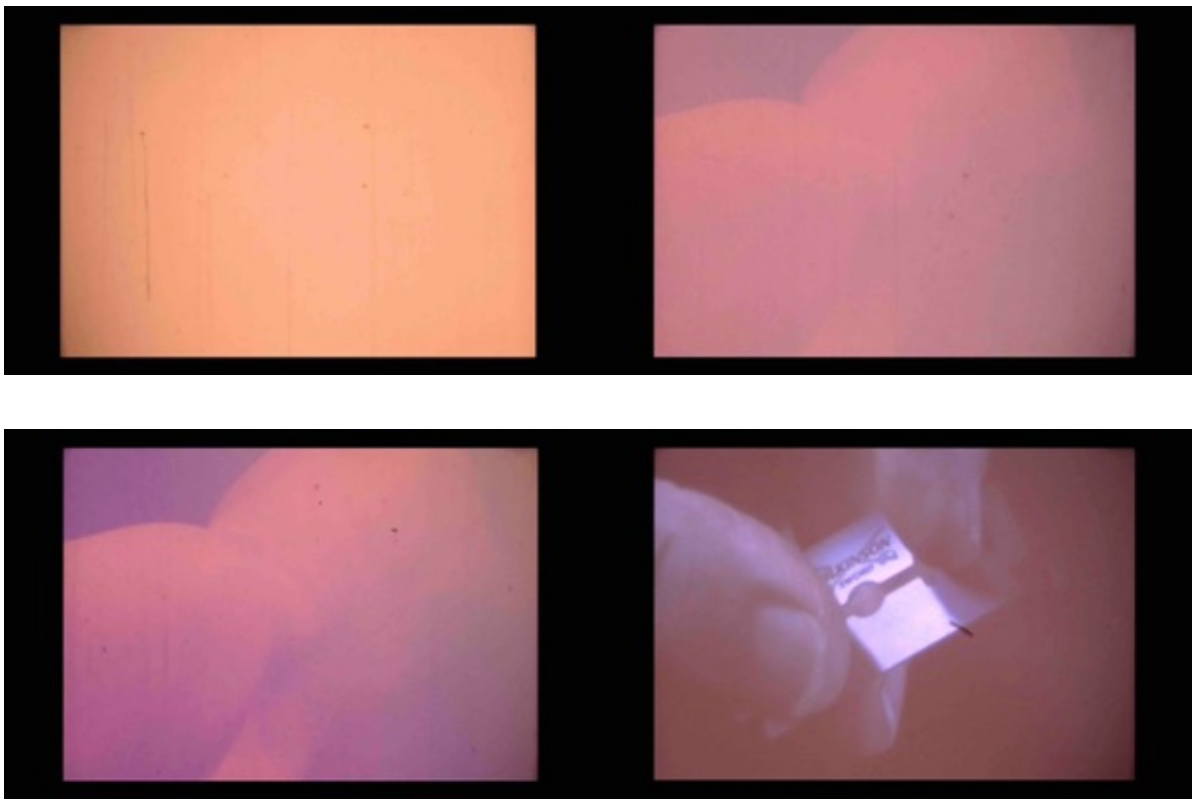
…*my beauty*… consists of a 3m x 2m digital projection with sound, 3 minutes and 26 seconds on loop, installed in a 3m x 4m gallery space (link: https://vimeo.com/744299163). I shot the film in my studio on Kodak Vision3 500T Colour negative film 7219 film. The body and the hand were double exposed on the same film strip using a Bolex 16mm Reflex camera,[22] and I hand processed the film before projecting it onto a screen and filming the projection with a JVC HD Camcorder. I describe the process of shooting and developing the film on pages 167 - 172 of this chapter. I edited the resulting film with Adobe Premiere Pro. The post-production process mostly entailed slowing the footage down so that each frame can almost become distinguishable and the corresponding sound appears very distorted. It also involved replicating and repeating parts of the imagery.

The artwork represents the moment of the cutting of my skin, through imagery of the body, the tool of self-injury, in this case a Wilkinson razor blade[23], and sound. It challenges the audience to witness the build-up towards the moment of the cut, to stay with the discomfort of this transition and arrive at the other side to gain a perspective through an embodied experience. This installation explores the equivalence of photochemical film to skin, thereby presenting the skin as a boundary that, I propose, has the capacity to articulate the shift from the body-as-object to the

[22] The Bolex 16mm Reflex camera has the capacity to expose film to light more than once due to its release and rewinding facility. It is important to consider that the film will be exposed to light more than once and to use, therefore, lower settings for each exposure to increase the quality of the image.
[23] The Wilkinson razor blade is a gendered object that pre-dates disposable razors.

body-as-subject. Furthermore, by displaying the fleshiness and the object used to cut, the work articulates both my shame and horror at the act of cutting.

The image on the screen emerges slowly from white, along with the sound rising from silence (figures 32 – 34). Pink and orange fleshy tones materialise that seem to pulsate with a metallic slicing sound. Scratches and watermarks, a result of the hand processing, move across the screen. The still back of a reclining woman slowly appears among darker purple colours, and then disappears again in oranges and pinks, and this emerging and fading into colour repeats in the next 20 seconds. Then, for a fraction of a second (at 00:31), a razor blade flashes on the screen (figure 35).



Figures 32, 33, 34 and 35. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, stills to 00:30

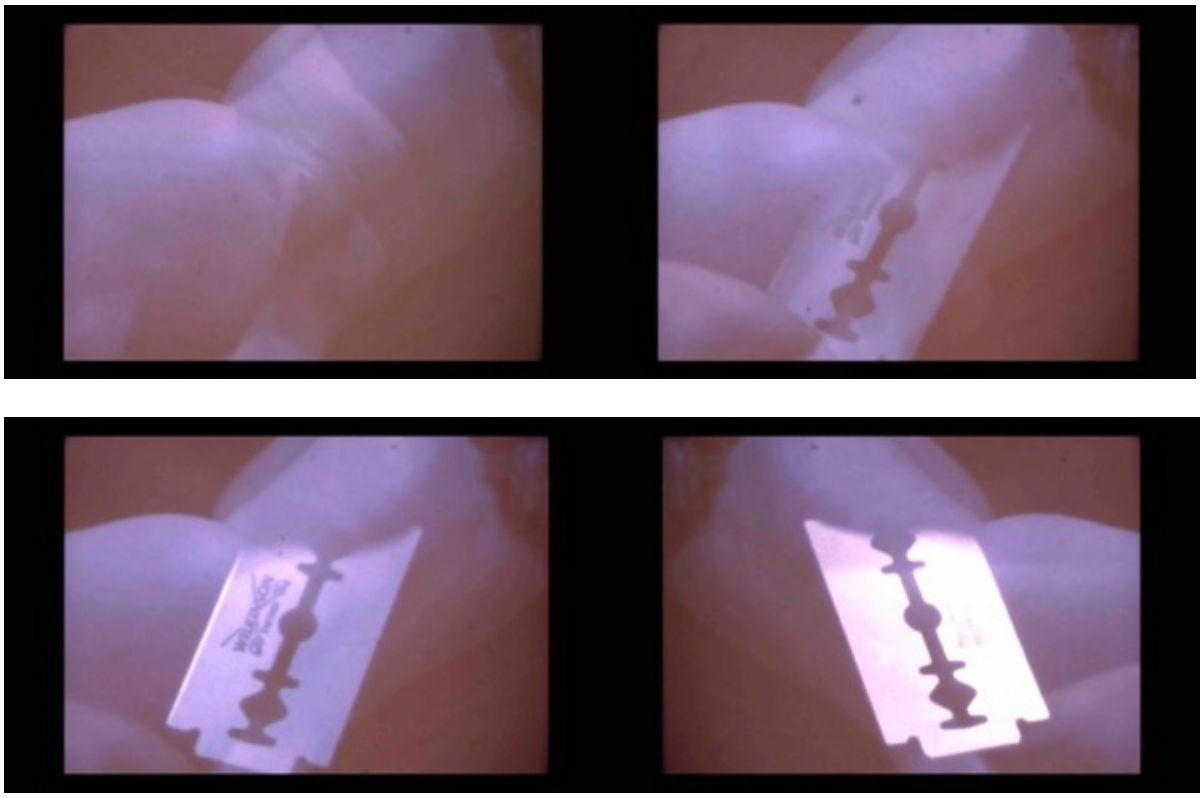
Throughout the next 23 seconds (from 00:31–00:54), the flashing of the razor blade becomes faster and faster until it looks almost static on the screen. It is only at this point that it becomes obvious that the blade is being held between fingers. The flashing stops and what remains visible is the reclining body with a hand slowly turning the razor blade over and over. The analogue footage is slowed down in digital post-production, leaving the scratches, watermarks and other imperfections from hand processing visible as they move slowly across the screen. The sound accompanying this imagery starts as a quiet, nonintrusive but slightly grating droning, with the occasional metallic *flick*, as though the razor blade is being flicked. This is the sound of a splice in the film running through the gate of the 16mm projector.[24] The sound is slowed down at the same rate as the footage, conveying a sense of disruption to the audience.

This part of the film (from 00:31–00:54) represents the points in time when I am feeling the disembodied distress that accompanies intense intrusive thoughts, where I become obsessed about the possibility of ending my distress by cutting myself. At this point, I am feeling dissociated (or estranged) from my body, and yet experience a paradoxical and deep sense of discomfort which I need to stop. This is the only thing my thoughts are focused on: making it stop. The body lies with her back to the camera, the camera pointing upwards towards her head, is intended to articulate a sense of powerless surrender, with no agency to change anything. The razor blade that flashes across the screen represents the forbidden thoughts or instructions that

[24] A splice is where two ends of film are joined, in this case by tape.

seem to force their way into my mind. These two images, the body and the razor blade, are separate images in the footage (figures 34 and 35); however, this is meant to show how subtle my dissociation from my body is.

There is a moment in the process where I decide to pick up the blade. This is when the intrusive thoughts loosen a little, and there is more space to contemplate and feel now that the decision has been made. With this comes a small amount of relief; I have some agency and I am now holding the blade. In …*my beauty*…, this is the point (00:54–2:00) where the film shows the hand turning the blade over and over, in a slow and deliberate pace, on top of the woman who is still lying with her back to the camera. This part of the film has been shot as a double exposure in the camera (the process of which I describe in the next section), hence both images are visible at the same time (figures 36-39), representing a sense of resolution in the decision to pick up the blade. However, as the footage slowly advances, this sensation is replaced by something more urgent and the razor blade, once faint and imperceptible, becomes clearer. Glinting in the light again, its presence presses into my awareness. The sound complements the feeling of alarm with the metallic *flick* which becomes slowly more constant and urgent. This urgency represents the moment prior to the cut.



Figures 36, 37, 38 and 39. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, stills from 0:54 – 2:00

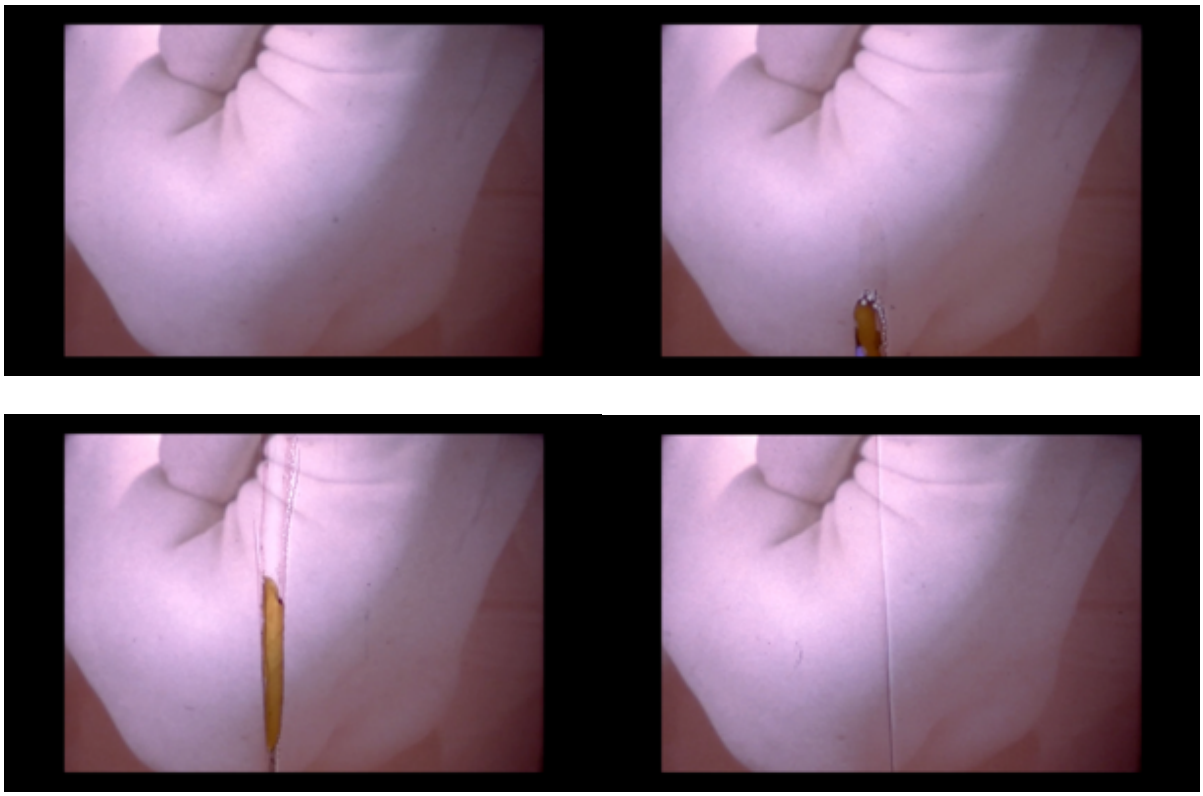
An audience member described their experience of this moment as follows:

> This part of the film oscillates between beauty and disgust. I can feel the inherent instability of the moment. I can feel the fleshiness, the visceral quality of the flesh and the blade. There is a moving and pulsating that adds to the materiality of the flesh. Like when you see cameras going inside bodies and you see the flesh moving and pulsating, and I feel uuuuugh, you shouldn't be able to see that… It's too up and close and personal. I sense a wanting to move closer towards it and also wanting to move back from it (Davina Kirkpatrick, February 2022).[25]

When the razor blade glints its brightest, the film cuts to a different shot showing a woman with her back to the viewer, but in a seated position (2:00). What appears to

[25] Recorded Zoom conversation between the researcher and Davina Kirkpatrick, with permission to share the transcription.

be a slice cuts upwards through her body and the sound fades to silence (02:00–02:02) (figures 40-43).



Figures 40, 41, 42 and 43. …my beauty… 2019, [Single screen video projection], Under, Plymouth Art Weekender, stills from 02:00 - 02:02

This part of the film utilises a fortuitous flaw in the emulsion that tears across a few frames, leaving a final scar running vertically across the centre of the film. The imperfection in the film emulsion allowed me to manipulate the footage digitally in order to articulate the moment of the cut. Once passed, the footage is quiet, as though the body is breathing. The film is slowed down to the degree that the frames seem to pulse as they pass through the gate of the projector. The figure of the woman sitting naked, with her back towards the viewer is unmoving right up until the

image fades towards the close of the film. For me, this conveys the idea of peace and rest.

This final scene, from 02:02 to 3:25, is intentionally lengthy in order to allow the audience to settle into what feels like a restful and self-caring space, where breathing can return to normal and the body can be felt again as a living, sensorial being.

The same audience member told me:

> I relate the ending to a ritual process. It was really important to have that slowness at the end. It felt safer, I was safely taken out of the closeness, more ordinary female body, slightly further away, more distant, separation, more space, silent, breath (Davina Kirkpatrick, February 2022).

The photochemical skin as flesh

As I have mentioned previously, the decision to use photochemical film is significant in the articulation of self-injury, the cutting of skin, and the quality and type of the image produced. In this section, I expand on the processes that led to the image production, which include the type of film used, the filming technique of double exposure and the hand processing method of cross-processing.

I follow this with an analysis of the ways that the film makes use of the material properties of photochemical film to communicate how breaking the surface of my skin, which acts as a boundary, has the capacity to shift me from an experience of my body as an object to my body as a subject. Here, I discuss the ways through which photochemical film suggests this equivalence, in the context of the phenomenology of the skin as a boundary. This enquiry allows me to examine understandings of self-injury through the materiality of photochemical film.

Kim Knowles reflects in her essay 'Self-skilling & home-brewing: Some reflections on photochemical film culture', published in the *Millennium Film Journal* (2014):

> The intricacies of film can be seen, touched, smelled and tasted. Albeit not just in the process of making, but the feeling of film also inherently lies in the viewing — the restless silver grain, the chemical compound that makes up the image, shifts before our eyes as the rays of the projector's light shine through and animate the film (2014, p. 21).

For my research enquiry, a haptic, embodied relationship with the film was important, so that my own hands were in contact with the materiality of the film at all stages of the process. Knowles argues that, rather than being obsolete, photochemical film is still a relevant and desirable method of image-making for many contemporary artists (2014, 2020, p. 25) – I described two such artists in Chapter Three. In my research, I draw on Knowles's thoughts on photochemical film: 'Its physical nature is precisely its draw and its organic nature serves as a reassuring reflection of our own bodies' (2014, p. 21). For me, winding the film around the spool in the camera, hearing the wound-up motor of my Bolex purr as I shoot the film, unloading the camera, loading the Lomo tank[26] and mixing the developer are all entirely embodied processes. When I am waiting for the developer to act on the film, I spend my time focussing on my breath and the sensations in my body as I listen to the time ticking, nervously anticipating the results. This embodied awareness is heightened by paying close attention to my direct physical experience in a similar way to when I am engaged in movement practice. However, it is possible to extend this enquiry towards the materiality of the film itself, including the emulsion - the light-sensitive surface on the acetate substrate of the film, which utilises silver halides that react to light in the

[26] The Lomo Tank is a tank for developing 16mm and 8mm film, devised in the USSR.

camera. This surface is an unpredictable tender skin that responds to all types of contact, from light, chemistry, water, the touch of my hand. The way it responds to these materials is both controllable and understandable *and* uncontrollable and baffling in equal measure. My job as a filmmaker using this medium is to understand what I can control and let go of what I can't. This process is both enlivening and terrifying at once. It requires me to consider the agency of the film itself beyond my own systematic processes. This adds an additional layer of wonder to the process, allowing the agency of the film to interact with that of light, chemistry, and other materiality that influence it. In this sense, the medium ceases to be simply a means to an end, but importantly, it partners me in the creation of the outcome. We travel together towards an unknown destination.

***The making of* …my beauty…**

As previously mentioned, in …*my beauty*…, I utilise the analogue properties of the film to create an embodied articulation of the moment of the cut in self-injury.

Getting ready to shoot/process film

It is crucial to ascertain the film and the method of processing before any shooting happens. In this instance I decided to use Kodak Vision 3500T Colour negative film 7219, which is made for 'Day Interior/Windowlight' (https://www.kodak.com/en/motion/product/camera-films/500t-5219-7219) because I was to shoot in my studio, which is well lit by large windows and a Velux skylight. Additionally, I planned to cross-process the film in E6 chemistry, traditionally used for processing colour transparencies. Using this developer would enable me to produce

a positive image direct from film originally designed to produce a negative image. Cross-processing tends to result in more muted, pastel tones, which are less bright or sharp in colour, with less contrast between light and shadow. This effect could work well for this film, as I wanted to create an ambiguous image. There are necessary adjustments needed in the shooting of the film to ensure a clear enough image in the final work. It is necessary to overexpose the film by three stops: two stops in the camera, by adjusting the ISO of the film (halving the ISO twice, so for a 500T, I would half to 250 and then again to 125, setting the ISO on the light meter to 125 for a reading to set the aperture), and one stop in the development process, which basically amounts to either more time in the chemistry or a higher temperature, in this case, according to the E6 developing instructions, I would add two minutes onto the developing time.

Shooting the film

…my beauty… was shot in my studio on a Bolex h16 Reflex with the help of another artist to shoot the film. I planned to create a composition with my naked body and my hand turning a razor blade over in my hand that would include both single and double exposure.

In the first instance I made some test shots with a digital camera, these can be seen, in unedited form, here: [https://vimeo.com/818396626, password: mybeauty]. Having worked through the pose that I wanted, and the way that I wanted to move my hand, we set up for shooting with the Bolex. The first shots were single exposure, which are straightforward, where the film is exposed only once. Setting the camera is also more straightforward, as I can read the light with a light meter and identify the aperture size direct from that.

Shooting double exposure footage

In the case of the footage where I wanted my hand and my body to be overlaid in the same shot, I had to think through the two layers carefully. The important thing to consider with double exposure is that the film is run through the camera twice, therefore the light-sensitive emulsion takes up both images. This means that it is important to reduce the amount of light reaching the film for each shot, so that both images stand a chance of being exposed onto the film without overexposing the film. To do this, I reduced the aperture by one stop for each layer of exposure. First, I shot my hand, turning over the razor blade as it glinted in the sun. I positioned my hand over a black surface as this would ensure it was only my hand that would create an image. After making note of the position of the film in the camera, I shot the piece. The Bolex is a great camera for working in this way, as it is possible to wind the film back to the original position marked. On doing this, I reshot my body, lying on the floorboards of my studio.

Developing the film: cross-processing

As many writers reflect (Knowles, 2014, 2020, Gunning (2019), Tscherkassky (2019), the use of photochemical film has entered the artist's studio so that we can participate with the whole process of the film, from shooting to developing rather than relying on the few and rather expensive film professional processing labs. As Peter Tscherkassky says, it is of 'utmost importance […] to point out the *specific artistic* potential offered by a strip of film' (2019, p.94). But in order to be self-sufficient in the home or studio lab, artists have had to find alternative ways to develop their film. In this case, the traditional way of developing this film, in a lab, would be using ECN-2 processing chemicals. As mentioned above my plan was to cross-process using E6

chemistry. Briefly, this process involves the following steps, in this case, the timing and the temperature was decided by testing strips of the same film before immersing the whole film in chemistry (being sure to include a two-minute increase in developing time, therefore pushing it by 1 stop):

Remjet[27] removal, using a prebath

First Developer 40 degrees at 8' 15"

Colour Developer 40 degrees at 6'

Bleach/Fix 40 degrees at 6'

I am careful to write all the details of all the shooting and the developing at every step of the process, including start and end temperatures.

The resulting footage

The result, in this example, is that the colour has turned out a rather fleshy, pinkish orange, with purple tones, which become more bluey in the footage that has been double exposed. The double exposed image creates a ghostly slowly moving presence of the hand that only slowly becomes recognisable, as does the razor blade between the finger and thumb which seems to get clearer as it begins to glint in the light. The hand and blade, in its slow reveal, seems to threaten the still body behind it. A link to the unedited footage can be found here, [link: https://vimeo.com/820230524, password: mybeauty]. These fleshy hues accentuate the presence of the body and the visceral quality of the flesh.

[27] Remjet is a black surface on the rear of the film that is designed to protect it from exposure from the rear, which can happen with some viewfinders.

The emulsion of the film is very tender, particularly when wet. During the developing process, it spends upwards of 30 minutes in chemistry and being rinsed with water, making the emulsion soft, pliable and very easy to damage, especially in the hand-developing process. Consequently, *…my beauty…* bears the scars of this process, from light hairline scratches to deeper scores cutting right through the emulsion. I use one of these deeper scores to articulate the cutting of my skin. Slowing the film down in digital editing gives the impression that the image is being sliced through, when, in fact, the scoring is only across three or four frames, which equates to less than a second in a 16mm film.

The fleshy and photochemical skin: an analysis of …my beauty…

…*my beauty…* posits the skin as the boundary between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, and prompts the audience to question the philosophical and physical nature of being wrapped in an envelope that has the capacity to identify us as both object and subject. Reflecting on this made me enquire into the film's equivalence – as defined by David Batchelor in Chapter Four – with my own skin. The surface of the film is tender and fragile, yet holds the image, or might I even say the identity of the film as it determines what the film will look like. My skin, the external articulation of who I am, envelops my whole body. I am bound by my skin and it has the potential to objectify me. When I am wrapped in my skin, I am an object. When I am feeling my interior fleshiness from within, I am a subject. Both Michel Serres and Didier Anzieu reflect through a philosophical lens on the nature of

skin as a boundary. In *The Five Senses, The Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (1985),[28] Serres discusses the soul in the context of the skin and claims that the soul isn't located in one particular area of the body, that it 'comes into being in its very coming and going' (2008, pp. 4–5). Furthermore, he 'finds the soul above all on or in the skin, because the skin is where soul and world commingle' (2008, p. 5).[29] Likewise, Anzieu[30] refers to *le moi-peau* or the 'skin-self', arguing that the skin is the border between self and not-self (2016).

I employ the colour and presence of the body in *…my beauty…*, along with the properties of the film's emulsion to give an impression of fleshiness to the audience. To feel my own skin from the interior space is to include a sense of heat, tingling and indescribable liveness, and it is this awareness of the skin as a full-body envelope that I am inviting the audience to experience. The French word for film is *pellicule* and it refers literally to the envelope of the body: the skin. It is the association of my own skin with the *skin* of the film that I am evoking in this artwork. Whereas, according to Serres, the skin is where the soul and the world commingle, and Anzieu asserts that the skin is the boundary between self and not-self, I argue that my experience of self-injury is an expression of how the relationship between myself as subject and my exteriority / self-as object has broken down.

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[28] *Five Senses* was originally published in French as *Les Cinq Sens* in 1985. The version referred to here is translated by Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (2008).

[29] I acknowledge that the definition of *soul* is vast and largely ambiguous, so my reading of Serres's use of the term refers to my sense of 'embodied selfhood' (Folkmarson Käll, 2009, p. 125) and 'me-ness' (Slatman, 2014, p. 72), as described previously. Furthermore, I draw on Serres because the spirit of the language used here allows the reader to get a sense of the commingling he refers to.

[30] *The Skin Ego* was originally published as *Le Moi-peau* in 1995. *The Skin-Ego: A New Translation by Naomi Segal* was published in 2016.

Knowles explores the ways through which photochemical film practices have allowed us to rethink cinematic materiality and its relationship to the body. She reminds us that because of the film's limited lifespan, both materially and culturally, it has been made equivalent to the body in many contexts through the process of making, developing and projecting. In an essay entitled, 'On the Materiality of Film', Emmanuel Lefrant expands this metaphorical potential by saying that the 'link that exists – through gesture – between the body and the art piece is made possible thanks to the existence of the physical matter of film' (2020, p. 33). Bradley Eros aptly describes the photochemical qualities of film by pointing to a directly material, physical and emotional relationship between analogue film practice and the body:

> As the light passes through the myriad densities of lucid skin, whether grayscales or color dyes, it's grazed by the haptic kiss of chemical stains and the luminous distortion of ocular lens as only this era of experience can claim. Trans-film, analogous to a human life, a presence that comes into being, decays and dies, it could be embraced as anima incarnate, that is, conscious of its own mortality and celebrated for its precious existence of material vulnerability (2012, p. 45).

I emphasise this vulnerability through the materiality of the film emulsion, exemplified in the *cutting* (between 02:00:15–02:02:12) of the emulsion that signifies the cutting of my skin. As Lefrant states, 'the "secret forms" of emulsion are unveiled and emphasize the materiality of celluloid as well as the processes that reveal the image' (2019, p. 34). This section of the film characterises the violence of self-injury (figures 40-43).

At this stage, as Kirkpatrick described, there begins ‘a wanting to move closer towards it and also a wanting to move back from it’. I equate this sensation with feelings of disgust. Sartre makes a pertinent link between disgust and shame, writing that ‘pure shame’ arises because I recognise myself ‘in this degraded, fixed dependent being which I am for the Other’ (2003, p. 312). Luna Dolezal interprets this as: ‘I am disgusted or disappointed with the dependency or vulnerability I feel before the other’ (2015, p. 39). Throughout this research project, while reporting my lived experience of self-injury, I have consistently felt shame. I believe this comes about in response to what Dolezal describes as ‘a social transgression in an intersubjective encounter’ (2015, p. 39) – in this case, with my audience. She further states that shame is the result of having ‘been rendered an object in the first place’ (Dolezal, 2015, p. 39). I propose that shame lies at the seat of my desire to cut my own skin, as an exposure of the objectification of my own body. As Sartre explains: ‘To put on clothes is to hide one’s object-state: it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is, to be pure subject’ (2003, p. 312). It is the skin, below the clothes, that is the site of this vulnerability and shame for me, and disgust for the viewers, in the case of …*my beauty*….

The last 1 minute and 20 seconds of the film consists of the image of an apparently still body. Even so, the body seems to have a kind of pulse, a gentle rising and falling in the image, like breath. The movement of the film through the projector creates ‘an imperceptible vibration of the image, to the limit of flickering, leaving the viewer contemplating an energy field floating at the surface of the image’ (Lefrant, 2019, p. 35), and reminding the viewer that the surface of the film is not inert. In this part of

the film, there is time to allow the viewer to reflect and to allow the emergence of a sense of completion, an ending to the ritual, as Kirkpatrick referred to in her feedback. This state can be likened to van Gennep's concept of the third phase of ritual, that of the post-liminal or re-incorporation (1960, p. 11). The imagery also reflects Serres's notion of the skin:

> The skin is the mutable milieu of 'the changing, shimmering, fleeting soul, the blazing, striated, tinted, streaked, striped, many-coloured, mottled, cloudy, star studded, bedizened, variegated, torrential, swirling soul' (2008, p. 5).

The surface of the film, as it pulses in front of the viewers' eyes, is similarly marked, scratched, aged and undoubtedly active.

Vicky Smith, in *Re:exposure* (2020), likewise uses the photochemical quality of the film to articulate skin. As described in Chapter Three, she creates extreme close-up imagery with either a single frame or short frame bursts of her body, showing the lines in her skin, the fine hair, the coarser hair of her eyebrows, her eyes, teeth and nostrils. The picture is in black and white negative and of very high contrast. At 2'34", the film cuts to her looking at the same footage and the footage of her mother on the beach on a lightbox. In the voiceover, Smith describes to her mother the nature of her own skin, her mother's skin in the sun and of the film:

> My skin is changing in ways that I've seen happen already to my mum… I talk to my mum about sun, sand, her mum and about change and time, erosion, aging. [We] discuss [my] mum's capacity to tan in the sun. The film is slow, it's not very sensitive to light, so I expose it for a long time (*Re:exposure*, 2020).

Smith uses the materiality of analogue photochemical film to explore questions about the skin, its changing and aging capacity. She explains this in the voiceover, but it is

also clear both in the first 2 minutes of film and the last 50 seconds, which show the close up of her flesh. In my understanding of *Re:exposure*, when the film cuts to the lightbox, Smith is examining the film as a separate object, a manner of flesh, but not necessarily her own, and she extends this investigation to her mother's flesh, while reflecting on the materiality of their corporeality in relation to the sun. This shift is only made possible by employing particular material qualities, that is, both the film's photochemistry and its form. As viewers, we are reminded of the equivalence of our skin with the film itself.

To conclude my analysis of *…my beauty…*, I reflect on the importance of agency in my experience of self-injury. The act of cutting my skin, as represented in the film, brings me back into a sense of myself as a subject, and it is this freedom to act, through the cutting, that gives me a sense of my own agency. I utilise the material of analogue film, as Knowles recommends, 'as a field of discovery, a photochemical playground that offers itself to the artist in the rawness and malleable nature of its physicality' (2014, p. 22). Furthermore, Knowles states that the artist becomes a 'resourceful inventor-bricoleur-alchemist' (2014, p. 22), and I propose that the act of cutting my own skin reflects a similar reclaiming of agency, by shifting the perspective from object to subject.

5.3 *Pinch Point*– 16mm Performance Installation, Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, Royal William Yard, Plymouth, September 2019

The blade slides too easily across my skin. It opens, I can see the edges of the cut flesh, no blood. No blood, breathe, blood. The dark red liquid begins to bubble into the wound and then onto the surface of my skin. For a moment it's like looking at someone else's flesh, and then, there's this feeling throughout my body, as though this blood that is seeping from my body, is also seeping into my body. I feel a tender warmth spreading across my flesh, and inside my body. I feel real again, me again, fleshy bloody tear soaked and exhausted, but me again.

Journal entry, September 2019

Pinch Point (2019) is a performance installation employing the same found footage that was used in *What Lies Beneath*. Like …*my beauty…*, *Pinch Point* explores the moment of the cut and the transition between the body-as-object to the body-as-subject; however, by utilising found footage of an unknown dancer juxtaposed with live performative presence, it reveals different details about the two states, particularly the body-as-subject, when I cut my skin. In my thesis, I use *Pinch Point* to explore the role of performance and how it can further uncover understandings of the processes involved in self-injury

A loop of found footage film is threaded through a pulley on the gallery's ceiling and projected onto a 4m x 3m screen in a room of about 4m x 5m. As described previously, the image is of a dancer, gazing at the camera as she silently moves across the screen. She appears to be dancing before a male gaze, embodying the. role of the objectified woman. In *Pinch Point*, the footage is about 7m in length, though this varies depending on the height of the venue's ceiling. The audience

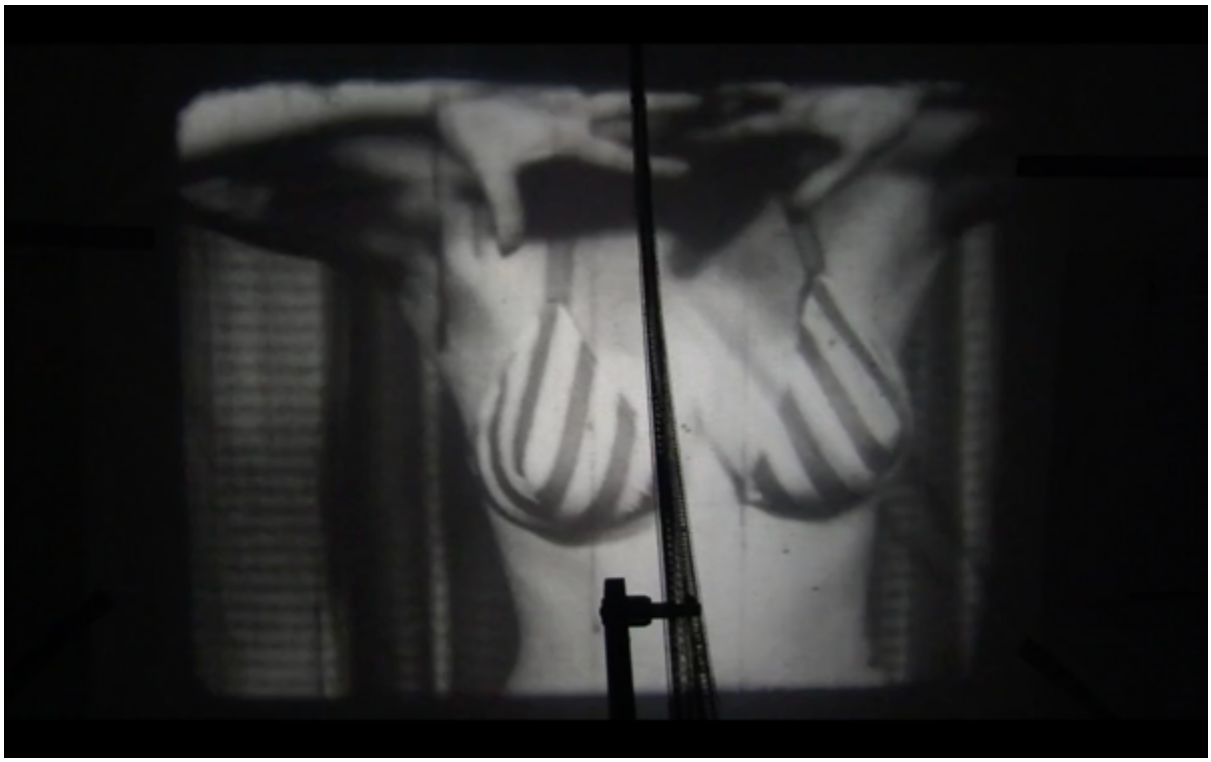
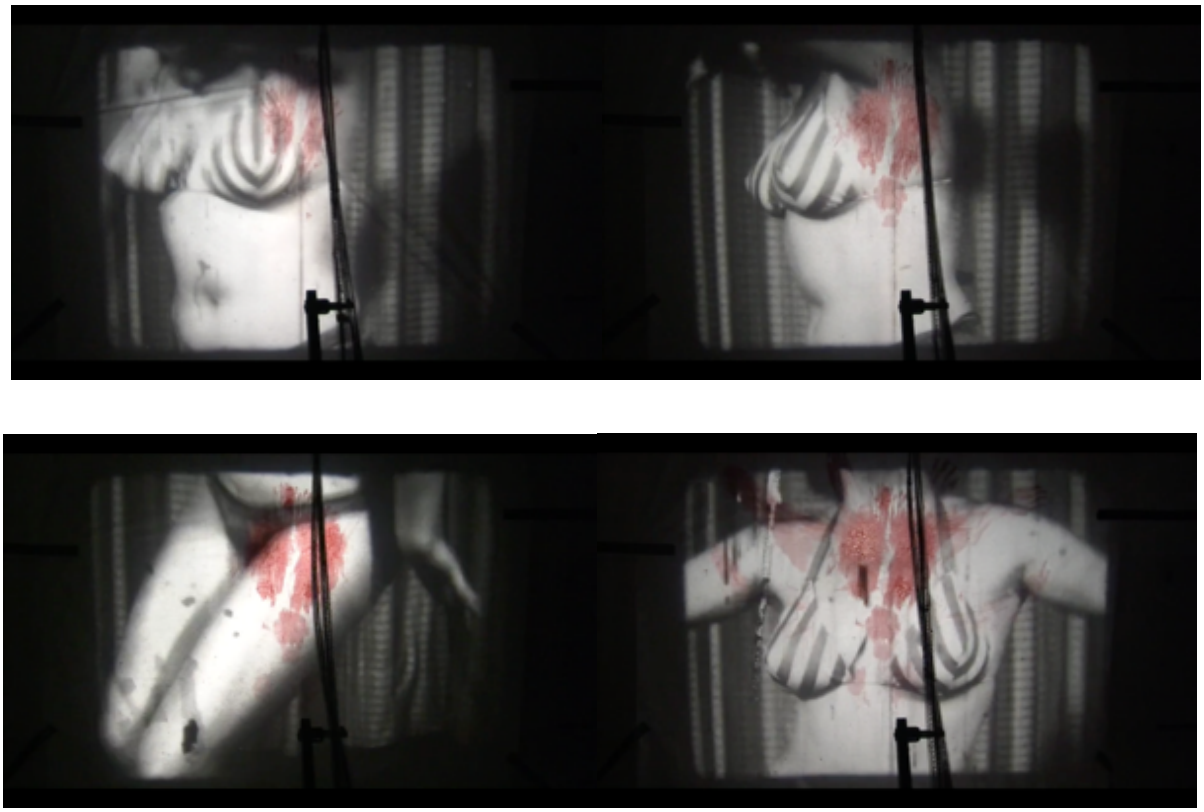


Figure 44. *Pinch Point,* 2019, [Performance Installation], Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, still of documentation of live performance

gathers around the back and to the sides of the 16mm projector to witness the performance. They watch the looped film play on the screen for 2 to 3 minutes. This filmic performer represents my body-as-object, as mentioned in Chapter Four. She is separated and functionally dissociated as a film running through the projector, and as an image on the screen; yet, she moves, gazes, smiles and gives the illusion of *aliveness*. While the film loop is running, uninterrupted, the performer moves as though in a trance, in repeated movements. Over time, her movement begins to lose that sense of *liveness*. She becomes a facsimile of a live performer, going through the motions, but not *alive*.

My role in this installation is multi-modal: I am artist, projectionist and performer. I operate as a performer in collaboration with the dancing woman in the film. We are both performers. As the film loop runs, I am positioned behind the screen, naked and hidden from the view of the audience. After a few minutes, I begin to push against the centre of the screen, distorting the projected image of the visible performer. The pushing, from my internal sense, has a feeling of urgency to it, of wanting to be released. It articulates the point where being in an objectified state begins to feel intolerable, where I begin to have intrusive thoughts that pull me further into an objectified, dissociated or estranged state. I am expressing this discomfort through my bodily actions, against the screen that is holding the image representing my objectification. After a couple of minutes,[31] I dip my hands in a red liquid and begin to push through the screen again. The liquid is a watered-down acrylic paint, mixed to a certain viscosity that is absorbable by the fabric screen. I use acrylic paint instead of real blood because, apart from the health and safety aspects of using human blood, I want the red stain to act as a metaphor for blood, to give the audience a sense of bleeding rather than a direct experience of it. The liquid begins to bleed through to the other side, slowly becoming visible to the audience. In time, the red stains spread across the screen, revealing hand and body imprints (figures 45 - 48). This represents my experience of the state where I begin to obsess about cutting my skin – as in …*my beauty…* above – where the intrusive thoughts become single tracked. Even though I don't yet act, an uncontrollable will to movement towards cutting emerges.

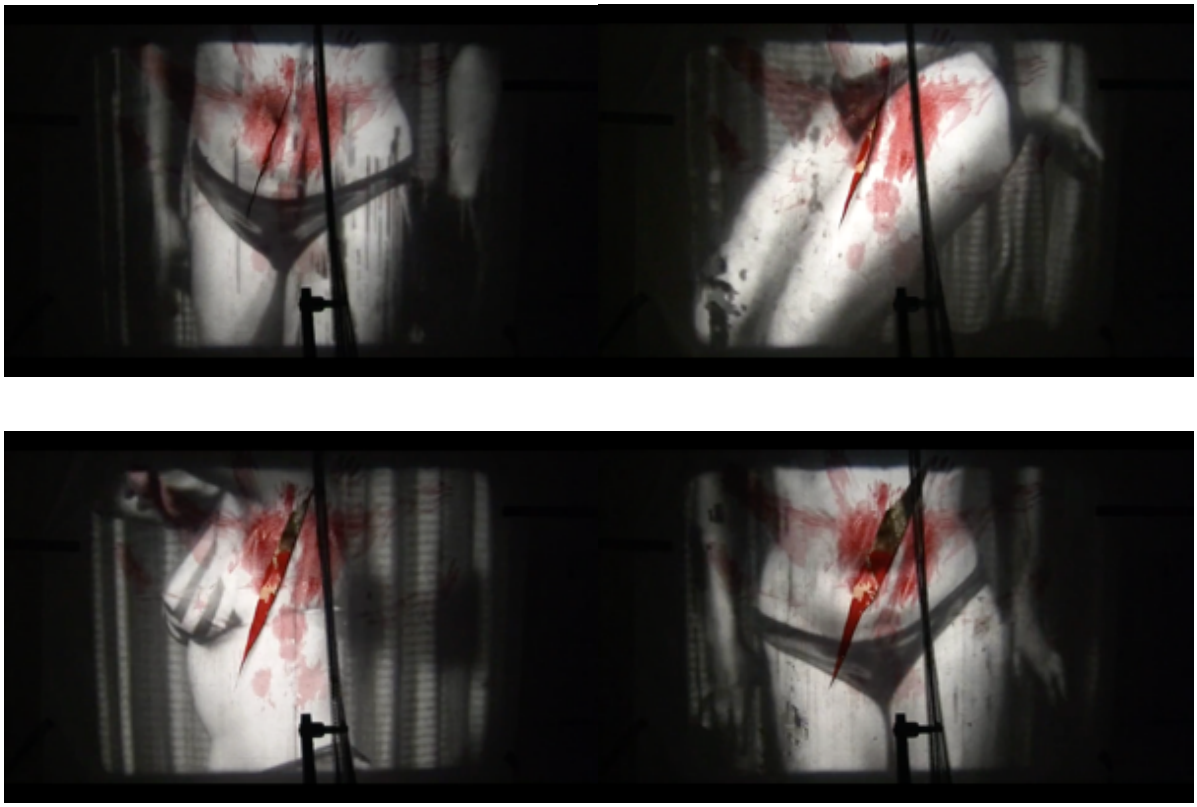
[31] The timings of this performance aren't easy to pin down, as I follow my embodied sense of what happens when, rather than adhering to a script. This gives me and the audience a sense of authenticity as my movements are unrehearsed and improvised and my body leads the way.



Figures 45, 46, 47 and 48. *Pinch Point,* 2019, [Performance Installation], Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, stills of documentation of live performance, detail of progression of red marking

Throughout the next few minutes, I continue pressing my paint-stained hands and body against the screen, leaving red oozing marks on the other side. There is some relief for me in this act, where I feel, for a short while, a sense of my body again. But this doesn't last for long. I am not satisfied. It is as though, by using the red stain, I am allowing my thoughts on cutting to take over, thus creating a sense of relief by the simple thought of cutting; the relief is short-lived. Soon, my obsession takes hold again. After the passage of a few more minutes, when I grasp an embodied understanding of the right time, I take a razor blade and slice through the screen, slowly, downwards from the top left, parting the screen slightly as I cut. The cut is clean and sharp, mirroring what it is like when I make a cut into my skin – the gap

opens softly, showing the inside of my skin, and there is no blood yet, but a clean slice of flesh (figures 49-51). In the performance, as the cut opens, the audience begins to see a figure behind the screen: breasts, hair and face (figure 52). With the projection continuing to run, the image moving on the scarred screen and the body standing still, quiet, breathing and visible through the cut in the screen, the performance ends. The bloodied body, seen through the opening on the screen, is a fleshy reminder of the quiet, internal state that I enter into once I have cut my skin. This is the moment when I feel my bodily sensations flooding back, when I feel my subjective self coming to the foreground, where *I am a body* rather than *have a body*.



Figures 49, 50, 51 and 52. *Pinch Point,* 2019, [Performance Installation], Test Space Research Symposium, University of Plymouth, stills of documentation of live performance, detail of the cut of the screen

The performative nature of skin: an analysis of Pinch Point

This performance installation communicates my experience of living as the body-as-object through the presence of the filmic performer, and, through a representation of the violence of cutting my skin, the shift into the body-as-subject. In this analysis, I focus on the shift to the body-as-subject from the perspective of liveness. I examine the initially invisible presence, the violence of the cut and the revelation of the embodied performer at the end of the piece. For further analysis of the body-as-object in the context of 16mm found footage, refer to Chapter Three and section 5.4 in this chapter.

Pinch Point sits between installation art and expanded cinema. The presence of the myself as artist, projectionist and performer, alongside the found footage of the dancer as performer, creates an interesting and important dialogue in the context of this intersection. By using my body in a live performance and interacting with the materiality of the projectors, the film and the filmic performer, my intention is to raise the audience's awareness of film's 'thingness' (Knowles, 2020, p.206). It is as though, in contrast to the live body, the materiality comes into view more strongly. Knowles maintains that such 'loud, messy, chaotic, often improvised and susceptible to failure' manner of performance 'get[s] under the spectator's skin' (2020, p. 206). In this case, the interplay between live performance and the dancer's performance, along with, arguably, the performance of the other objects in the installation, creates what Knowles describes as a 'corresponding layer of tangibility that fills the viewing space' (2020, p. 207).

My performances, including this one, are autoethnographic methods derived from my performative writing. *Pinch Point* examines, through performance, what happens in the transition between the moments prior, during and after cutting, to gain a better understanding of this behaviour, and thereby reduce the confusion around it. When Tami Spry started practising 'performative autoethnography' in order to alleviate her pain and confusion, she realised that her pain 'was connected to, and was inherently part of, larger sociocultural pains and confusions of gender, race, class, religion and more' (2011, p. 51). In the context of performative autoethnography, this method of research deems important the audience and the wider community by providing an understanding of the 'connection between selves, others, sociocultural context, and the language we use to articulate/represent those connections; it involves connections between personal experience and larger social issues' (Spry, 2011, p. 52). I suggest that the presence of the live body in the performative space gives the artwork a potency not necessarily available within a purely installation practice.

Richard Schechner, in his book *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985), compares performance and anthropology, naming six 'points of contact' between both disciplines (1985, pp. 3-33). It is clear through his analysis that Schechner is making an equivalence between performance and ritual, and it is through anthropological study that the processes of ritual are examined. Two of the six points of contact Schechner identifies are relevant to the performance described here.

These are the '[t]ransformation of being and/or consciousness' (1985, p. 4) and the '[i]ntensity of [p]erformance' (1985, p. 10).[32]

Schechner writes that performers, spectators and participants in rituals such as initiation rites are changed by the activity of performing, either temporarily (as with theatre) or permanently (as with rituals) (1985, p. 4). Such 'transformations of being', in the performative sense, reveal themselves 'in all kinds of anachronisms and strange, incongruous combinations that reflect the liminal qualities of performance' (1985, p. 6). Following my performance of *Pinch Point,* I held a short formal group session to gather verbal feedback from the audience. The comments cited below suggest that some audience members experienced the performance as a liminal space somewhere between performance and ritual. Viewed through the lens of autoethnography, my performance facilitates a shift in being and/or consciousness, described by the audience as follows:

> 'A bifurcation, an alchemical moment – until my brain could process what was happening – it was nonsense… like a magic trick.'
>
> 'Woman with war paint, in control.'
>
> 'I thought I could see you in the dark spaces of the piece.'
>
> 'You felt complicit, that safety margin had gone… it became potent.'

Schechner raises the question of what is expected of the audience in the context of consciousness transformation. He suggests that they might respond in ways that span a continuum, from observing from a distance to being swept up by the

[32] The other four points of contact are: audience-performer interactions; the whole performance sequence; transmission of performance knowledge; and how performances are generated and evaluated (Schechner, 1985).

performance, or anywhere in between (1985, p. 4). In this performance, for some members of the audience, there was a sense of a shift in awareness, described by one person as ‘potent’, and another as ‘an alchemical moment’. These comments suggest that some audience members were transformed to another state of consciousness during the performance.

Schechner’s second point of contact, the ‘[i]ntensity of [p]erformance’ (1985, p. 10), occurs where a threshold has been crossed. Schechner argues that if this threshold hasn’t been crossed, the performance fails (1985, p. 10). According to Schechner, audiences are aware of the moment when the threshold is crossed, when the performance takes off. ‘[A] “presence” is manifest, something has “happened”. The performers have touched or moved the audience and some kind of collaboration, collective special theatrical life, is born’ (Schechner, 1985, pp. 10–11). He explains that accumulation and repetition can facilitate the intensity of a performance, and that ‘the increasing and decreasing density of events temporally, spatially, emotionally and kinaesthetically’ become woven into an inevitable pattern (Schechner, 1985, p. 11). In this sense, *Pinch Point* utilises the repetition of the loop of found footage, filling the room with the visceral sounds of the projector and the screen with the ‘rhythms of the dancer, her eye on the camera, the objectified hypnotic swimming dance’ (audience member, 2019). While the intensity builds, two performers are revealed, myself as a live performer (but not necessarily identifiable to the audience at this stage), and the filmic dancer (who isn’t visible to me at this point). When I begin to smear the screen with red paint, the intensity of this accumulation grows, more consciously in the minds of the audience, as the red stain grows on the screen.

The built up is towards an unknown but intuited potential crescendo, where the intensity peaks or finds a conclusion somehow. This happens through the cutting of the screen and the revealing of my body on the other side. When the screen is cut and I am made visible, I become present behind the second performer, the filmed one, who is still present, still dancing, but less obvious, merging with my presence.

The following comments from audience members reflect the growing intensity that peaked with the cut:

> ‘It was very violent and affecting.’
> ‘I felt I needed to be slightly protected from it.’
> ‘I saw the cut at the end as being more of a revelation.’
> ‘I was looking through the lens of my camera as if I was protecting myself.’
> ‘Felt a kind of trauma of watching.’
> ‘Activeness and passiveness pushed into by the revealing red.’

The two points of contact between anthropology and theatre provide a useful framework for exploring the efficacy of performance in the context of both self-injury and installation practice. The value of the performative intervention is foregrounded because of its potential to cause the transformation of being/consciousness and the intensity of performance, with reference to audience feedback. When Schechner speaks about anthropological equivalence, he is in fact referring to the ritual aspects of performative acts. I propose that ritual is embedded in this performance, in order to articulate self-injury effectively to a live audience. This clearly demonstrates the role of ritual (as performance installation) in revealing an embodied illustration of self-injury.

It is important to reiterate the function of performative autoethnography in uncovering 'a deeper critical understanding with others of the ways in which our lives intersect with larger sociocultural pains and privileges' (Spry, 2011, p. 51). Furthermore, Spry argues that it is through performative autoethnography that we gain embodied agency, an empowered theorising that has the capacity to confront feelings of powerlessness (2011, p. 51).

Pinch Point shows the moments of the cut and its relationship with the moments prior and after cutting. As one audience member suggested, 'it's all operating within the dancer's body – interchangeable roles, an internal view being revealed' (2019). These words beautifully articulate the way that the dancer's body characterises a strong manner of self-objectification that is hard to be escape from. Conversely, it may seem that the struggle represented by the movement against the screen and the colour bleeding through the screen takes place in opposition to the act of self-objectification, however whilst this is true, in my experience, the struggle initially accentuates the act of self-objectification. The artwork illuminates, I suggest, not just my lived experience of self-injury, but also the sociocultural territory within which the cutting happens. A statement from an audience member, 'eye on the camera, she's swimming in blood, femicide, objectified hypnotic swimming dance', reflects the ways in which women are repressed and objectified in society. Another person suggested that 'as women we carry the male gaze and the violence perpetrated against women within all our bodies' (2019). These observations broaden the reach of this performance installation by acknowledging that the work exposes the problematic position women hold in society; that we all carry the wound, not just selectively but

collectively. The wound of the cut, therefore, articulated in *Pinch Point* and …*my beauty…* might be interpreted to represent both the pain of the effacement and silencing that occurs in phallocentric societies, and a mark of freedom, or perhaps rebellion, that situates myself as a woman in this society. Both Naomi Uman's *Removed* and Eros's *Burn* communicate this effacement and silencing – but more on this later.

As with …*my beauty…*, *Pinch Point* makes a direct reference to flesh or skin. As Serres explains, it is in the skin that 'the world and body touch, defining their common border. Contingency means mutual touching: world and body meet and caress in the skin' (1998, p. 97). My performance allows this 'mutual touching' to be seen and understood by the audience. One audience member commented: 'I saw the cut at the end as being more of a revealing' (2019). Jane Kilby reflects that self-injury is a means for affirming an existence: 'I cut, therefore I am' (2004, p. 132). This statement is interesting in the context of *Pinch Point* and my research project, where I am suggesting a departure from Cartesian dualities by focusing instead on the diversity of experiences inherent in embodied subjectivities. In this performance, through the cutting of the screen, another, more visceral and fleshy body is revealed, which acts as a counterpoint to the dancer projected on the surface of the screen. Therefore, it is possible to align with Kilby's perspective by acknowledging that I am revealed through the cutting of my skin. I posit this argument with caution, however, as Kilby's statement derives from Descartes's 'I think, therefore I am', pointing to a Cartesian binary which can also imply, for example, *I am not, if I don't cut*. Kilby then reduces self-injury to yet another binary of *being* and *not being*, rather than including the

subtle subjective nuances that my research examines and uncovers. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, in their preface to *Thinking Through the Skin* (2004), where Kilby's essay can be found, point to the nuances produced by various explorations of the skin by talking about 'the skin as a site where bodies take form, suggesting that skin is already written upon, as well as being open to re-inscription' (2004, p. i).

Finally, I want to examine the wet, fleshy and breathing body that is exposed by the cutting of the screen. After I cut my skin, I am returned to a sensorial lived body, where I can feel an internal sense of myself as a subject. I feel the individual textures and tones of my lived body, which in this moment feels vulnerable and sensitive. I can see the flesh on my arm that is parted by the blade, and I can see the inside of my body, as in the performance. My lived body, in this instance, is longing to be felt, to be met, simply. And there is a need to look after my wound, to clean it and dress it. Taking care of my flesh, which is the boundary between the world and me, helps me feel myself more strongly and from a lived body-as-subject point of view.

In order to expand on my experience of my lived body, or my body-as-subject, I turn to Jenny Slatman and her study of Husserl's use of the word *Empfindnisse* (Husserl, 1952 in Slatman, 2014, p. 71). The word outlines the nature of the localised sensations that underlie what she describes as the *Leib*-experience (2014, p. 71). *Empfindnisse* can be translated into English as *sensings.* Neuro-physiologically, this relates to touch, pain, proprioception, kinaesthetic sensations and temperature perception (Slatman, 2014, p. 71). It is clear to me, however, that my experience of

my lived body is more than a physiological experience of sensations. As Slatman suggests, 'sensings cause me to experience my body as *mine*' (2014, p. 71) as it involves 'sensing our own tangibility', our own 'me-ness' (2014, pp. 70-71). In *Pinch Point*, this me-ness, that I identify as the body-as-subject, is revealed through the representation of the cutting of my skin as visualised by the staining on and the cutting of the screen, by breaking the boundary between myself and the world. It represents an act of breaking out of my dissociation into my lived experience of my body. Lisa Folkmarson Käll describes this phenomenon as 'embodied selfhood' (2009, p. 125). I will expand on this in the context of the dynamic relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject as I analyse my final artwork, *Flesh[wound]*, in the next section.

As mentioned previously, Uman's *Removed* and Eros' *Burn* – explored in detail in Chapter Three – are useful references in the context of *Pinch Point*. First, in *Removed*, Uman has rubbed-out all the presences of women, and the newly revealed spectral figures accentuate the absent bodies. In *Pinch Point,* meanwhile, the body of the filmic performer becomes more *spectral* as the performance advances and my live performed body becomes more manifest; the dancing performer is eventually distorted and disrupted, leading to a sense of absence. Second, in *Burn*, it is the role and gender of the artist and performer that is important for my analysis. The relationship between Eros, as a male performer, and the filmic performer has some resonance with *Pinch Point.* In *Burn*, the woman's eyes are closed and she is highly made up. The film, coloured in fleshy reds and oranges, jerks uncomfortably upwards as she melts, warps and splits, while Eros pulls on the

film strip and controls its movement through the projector. In *Pinch Point*, on the other hand, the filmic performer gazes at the camera and the audience. She is repeatedly going round the same loop, giving a distinct sense of being trapped. In both *Burn* and *Pinch Point*, the way the found footage is employed represents a loss of agency, where the control is with the live performer – i.e., the artist. In these films, at the time of their making, the gaze of the camera and its operator likewise held control.

Both these artworks can be examined through the lens of the object and the subject, however, they each portray these notions differently. In all these artworks, footages of women are manipulated to some degree; they are objectified, both in the filming and the artistic processes. Uman removes the women, revealing ghostly blobs as absences, Eros burns, wounds and damages the woman, and I cut through the woman. All of these represent a level of violence that, in my lived experience of self-injury, is necessary to generate a sense of my embodied selfhood, to feel myself as the body-as-subject. It can be argued that Uman's deletion with nail varnish remover and Eros's burning and destruction also release the objectified body from its imprisonment, in the same way that my cutting through my objectified self does.

5.4 *Flesh[wound] …*– 16mm Installation, Under, KARST Gallery, part of Plymouth Art Weekender, September 2019 and Royal William Yard, University of Plymouth, September 2020.

Tight… mind, tight... body… don't move too much, don't breathe, hold it all in. Nope, stay right there, shoulders tight, arms tight, little shallow breaths, don't let life into this body, keep it at arm's length, keep yourself at arm's length. Watch the anxiety grow here, hear your mind's resistance, mind in battle with body, mind winning, tightening, feeling of being located in my head, it feels heavy and clamped tight… The tightness tightens, body feels starved, no textures, timelessness, just tight and a growing resistance to even letting life through… It's hard to write about because my body longs for itself, longs to be felt, and slowly slowly this attention pulls it back into focus. Aaah, breathe, ease, space, body. Mind no matter, body expands and contracts, like waves on a beach. In out in out in out in out.

Journal entry, January 2016

When I turn my attention to my body, softly, with a slow silent mind, I can feel the internal textures, the sense of presence, that feels like a tingle, or a softness, from the inside out. My body pulses with a form of life that I can only feel, with attention, with a sense of awareness… There's a delicious timelessness here, my body… Effortlessly breathing softly, every breath felt from top to bottom, every tiny movement of my limbs, tingling, vibrating, internal matter being here… There's a healthfulness in this, my body knows, there's no pressure, there's just being.

Journal entry, December 2020

Flesh[wound] is an immersive installation that examines the dynamic relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject from a spatial perspective (link: https://vimeo.com/558719311). The audience is invited into a haptic environment and feel through their bodies their own lived experience of these states. The artwork goes beyond the direct lived experience of self-injury to communicate how the transition between the two states is in fact a universal experience. With the use of 16mm projection and film loops, the installation speaks to feminist materialism, positioning

the female material body alongside non-human bodies, raising further questions on the nature of embodiment.

Flesh[wound] comprises two 16mm projectors at each end of an installation space, facing towards the centre of the room, approximately 7–8 metres apart. At the centre of the room are two 30mm thick, 700mm squared Perspex screens, hanging from the ceiling a metre apart (figures 53 and 54). Each projector has a loop of film running through it and through a loop in the ceiling. The space feels lively with the sounds of the projectors and film loops rushing through the air, as well as the movement of the film and the imagery on the screens at the centre of the room. This artwork was shown once as part of Plymouth Art Weekender in September 2019 and then again at Mills Bakery in Royal William Yard, Plymouth, in 2020.

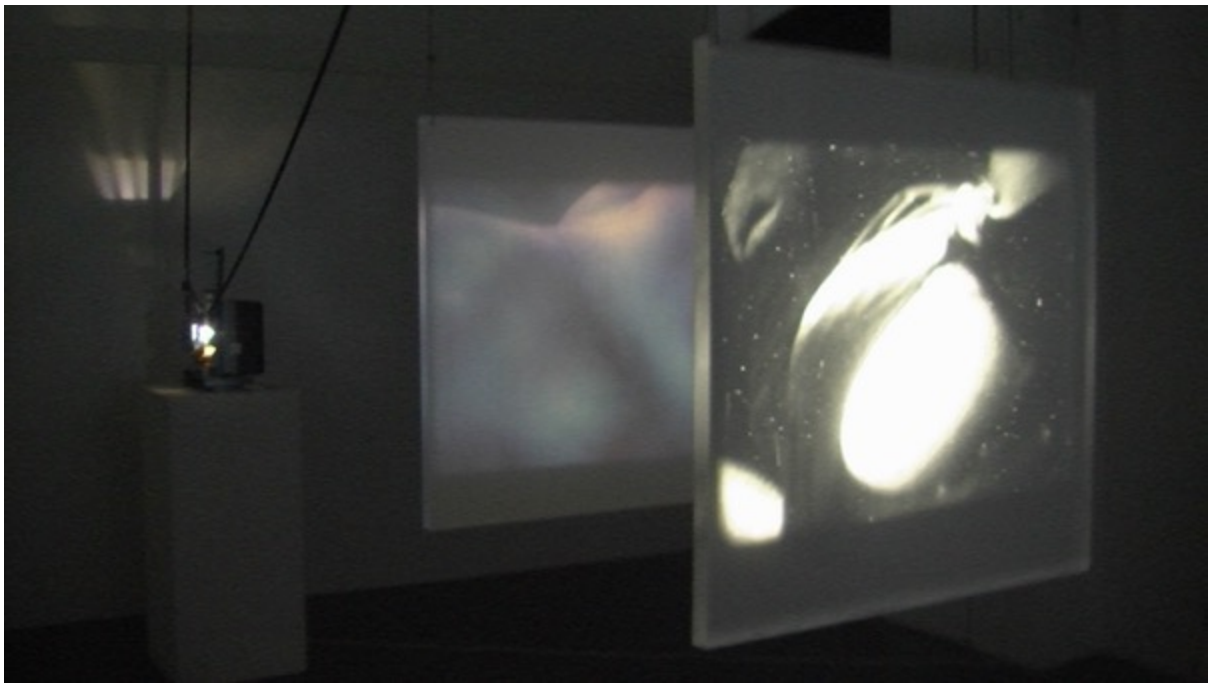


Figure 53. *Flesh[wound]*, looking to the left end of installation, Royal William Yard, University of Plymouth, September 2020.

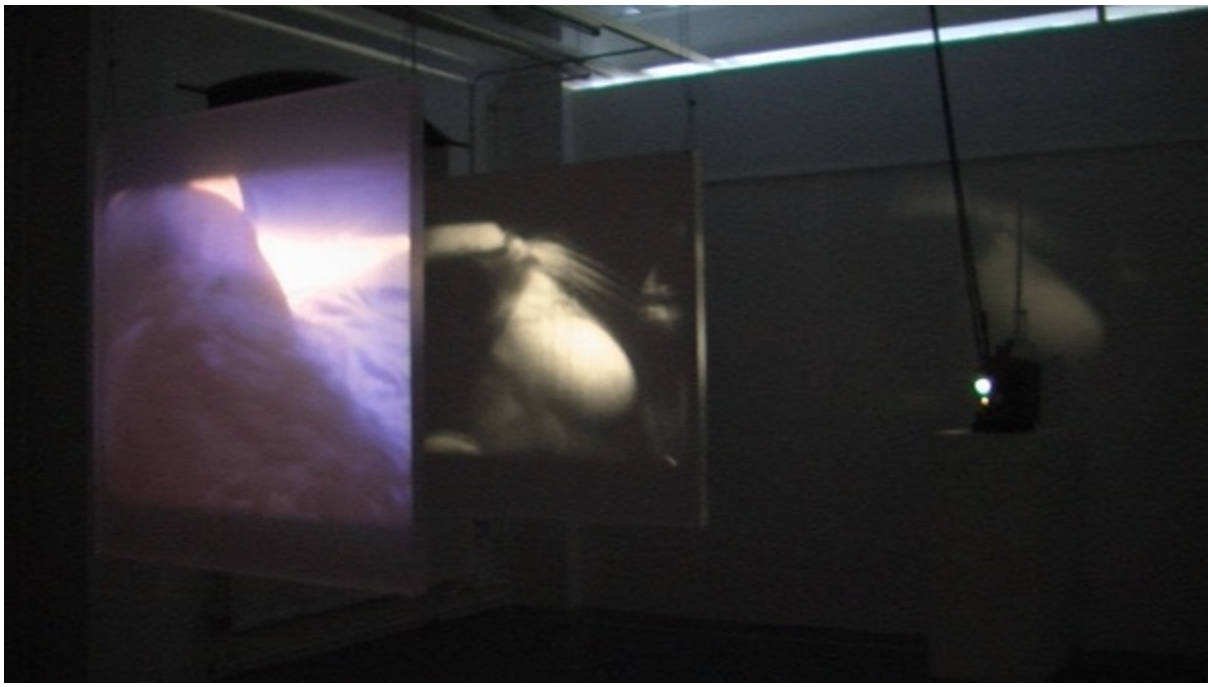


Figure 54. *Flesh[wound]*, looking to the right end of installation, Royal William Yard, University of Plymouth, September 2020.

On the screen closest to the entrance, there is a black and white footage of my female body. It appears jerky and fragmented, with visible breaks, holes and scratches on the emulsion of the film. As the images in figures 55 to 60 show, the body is distinguishable, but there is a slightly fuzzy, almost pixelated quality to it where the clarity of the image has broken down through the different stages of filming. This degradation of imagery represents the distortions that the body-as-object goes through as I project myself into the world. When I feel akin to a facsimile of myself, rather than feeling a strong sense of 'me-ness' (Slatman, 2014, p. 70). The image is jerky and moving fast, representing the sense of disjointedness that living out of this state results in. I describe the process of making this imagery on pages 202 to 204.

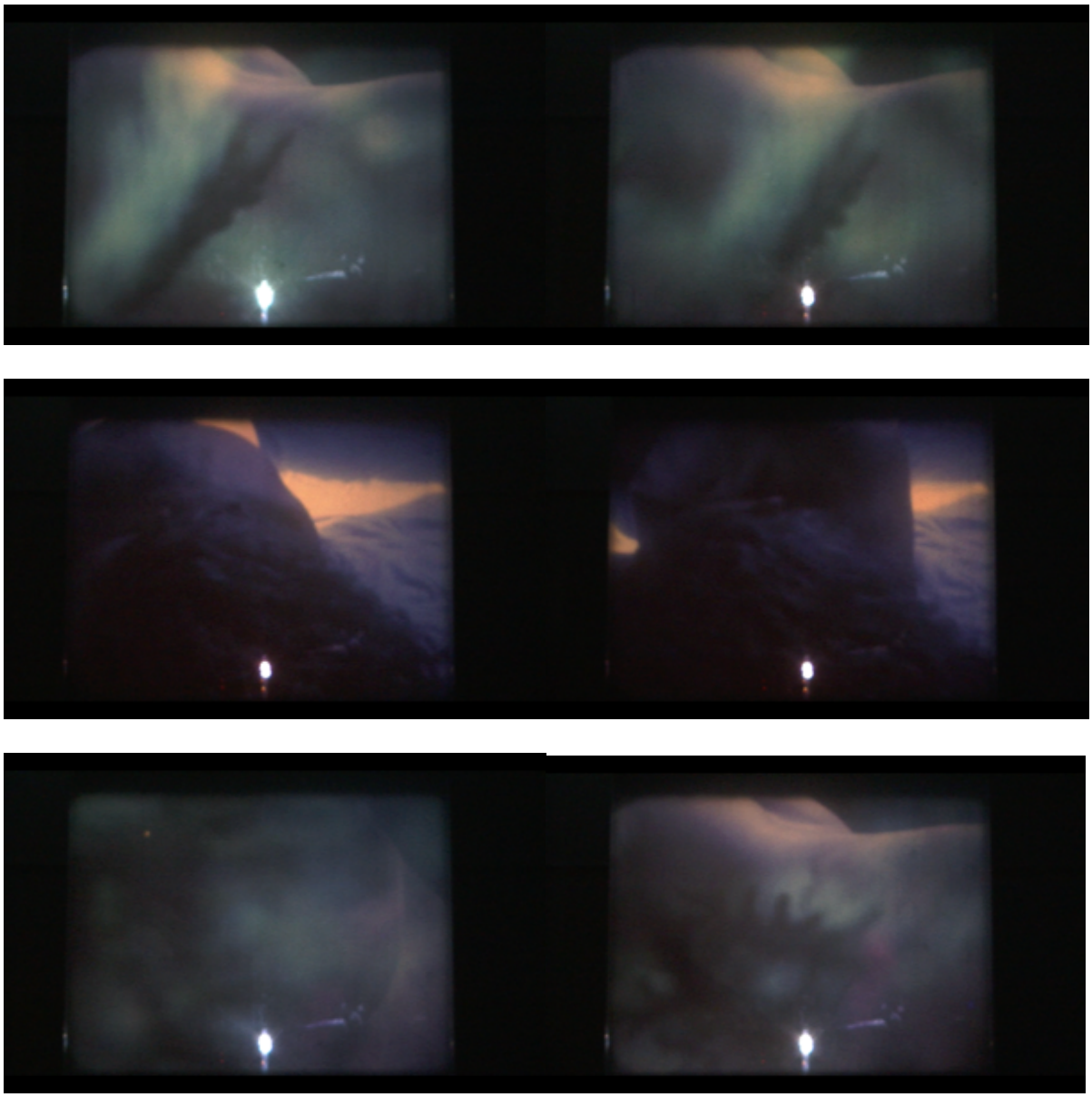
Figures 55, 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60. *Flesh[wound],* 2020, [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, stills of B/W film loop

Since it is on a short loop of about 6–7metres, the image repeats often, with a building frenetic energy. Standing on this side of the installation is intended to make the audience feel as though time is moving fast and, thereby, allow them to feel an embodied experience of stress.

The second loop, on the other side of the installation, is in colour. The imagery is a slightly otherworldly, gently moving, softly coloured film (figures 61-66) which shows some footage of my own body lying still with my back to the camera with the fronds of a conifer tree moving slowly in front at the lower half of the screen. This footage is made using double exposure as described on page170. This imagery alternates with a different shot of my body with the camera pointing away into a beam of sunlight shining across my naked body. In this footage I am turning slowly from left to right and back again. I describe the process of making this imagery on pages 204 - 205. The equivalence of landscape with the body here is evident. The colour tones in this footage are soft and subtle, with a slight purple-pink skin tone. As one audience member said, the footage has a 'sunset quality, a warm glow' (Kirkpatrick, 2022). The general impression is of calm and peace. Although the loops are running through the projectors at the same speed, this film feels easier to watch, even restful. It is as if, this side of the installation articulates a different sense of time, which is expansive, almost still. From an embodied perspective, this timelessness is indicative of the body-as-subject state, or, as described in detail in the previous section, 'embodied selfhood' (Folkmarson Käll, 2009, p. 125).

Audience members navigate the difference between the filmic representations of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject through their bodies as they move into different areas of the installation space. They can enter the space in between the screens, which represents the pivotal moment of the shift from one state to the other, articulating the ways that this separation isn't simply a binary switch, but a more complex concept. The imagery subtly plays on the bodies of audience members, and

within the materiality of the Perspex screens, when looked at from the sides. This multiple imagery articulates the complexity of the dynamic relationship between one state and the other (figures 67-69).



Figures 61, 62, 63, 64, 65 and 66. *Flesh[wound],* 2020, [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, stills of colour film loop

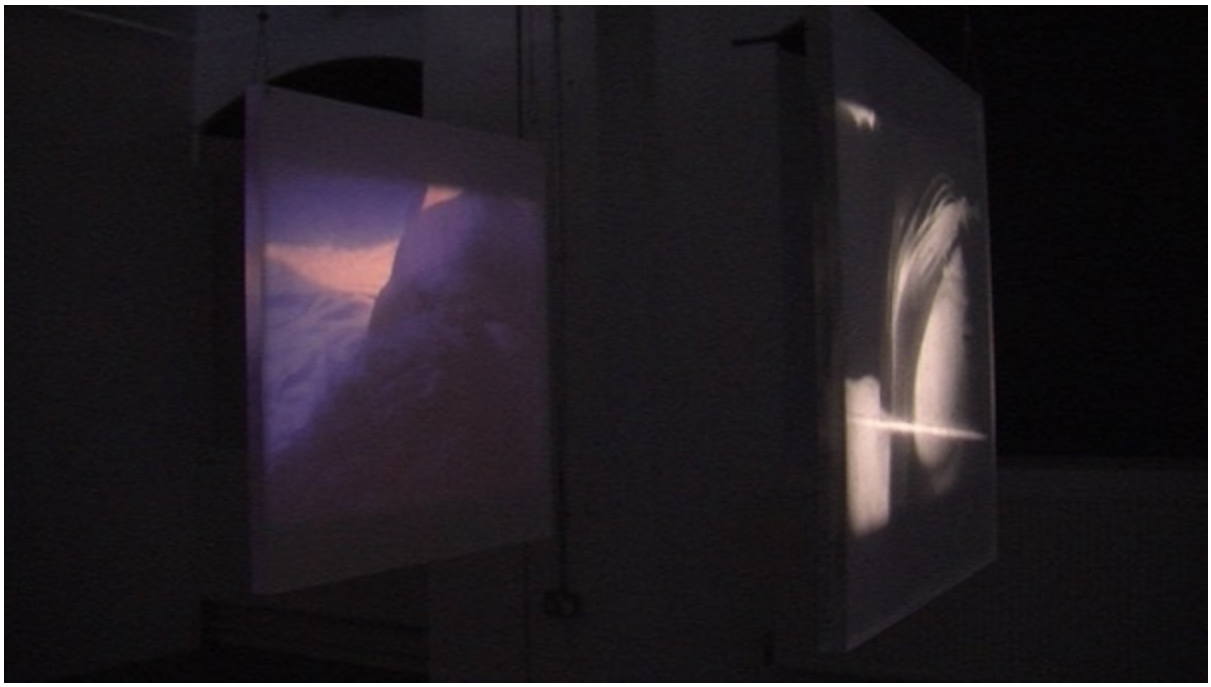


Figure 67. *Flesh[wound],* [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, Close up of central screens

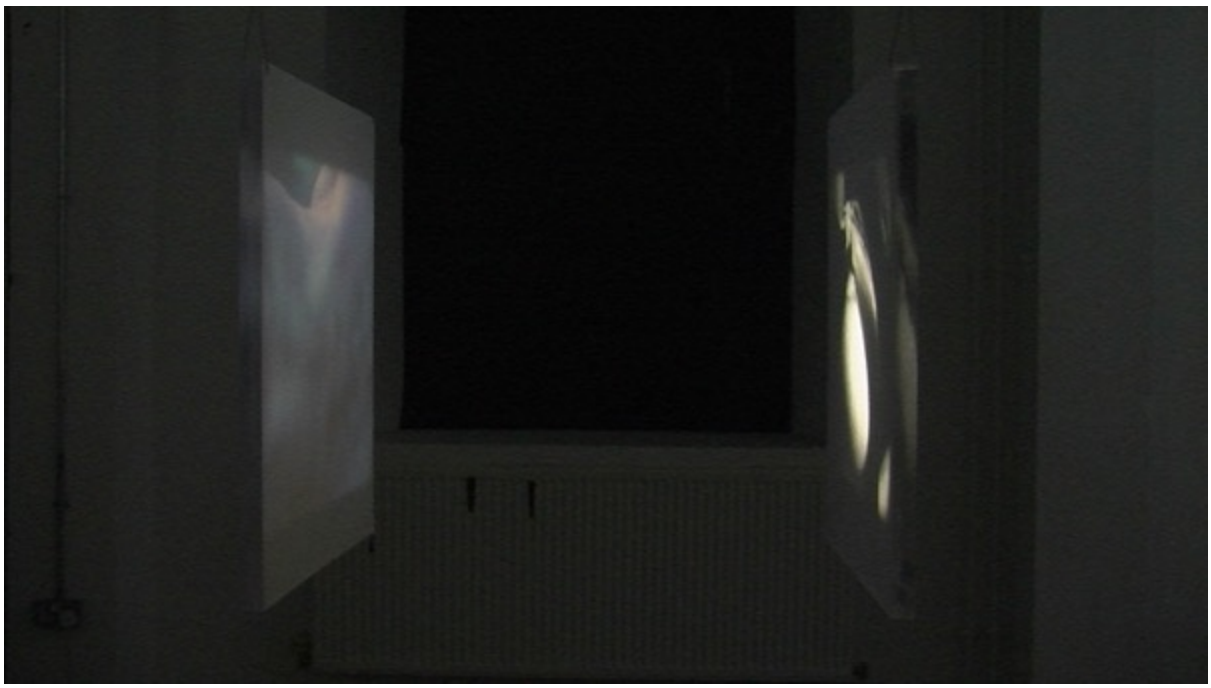


Figure 68. *Flesh[wound],* [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, Close up of central screens

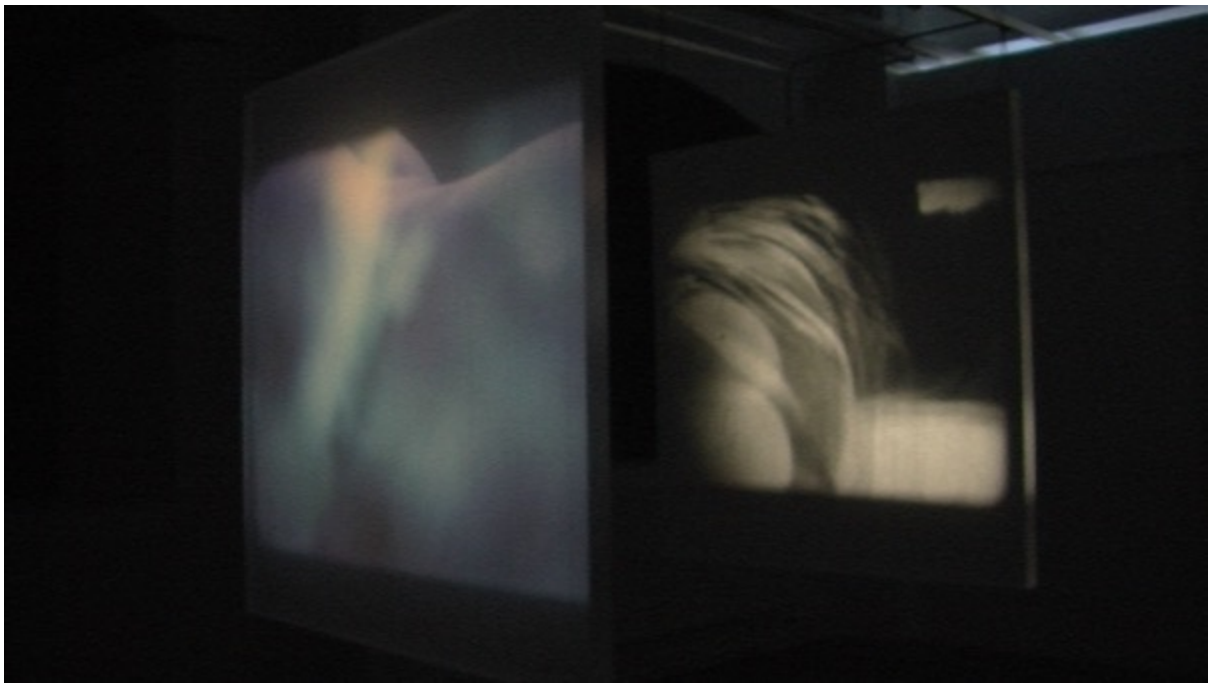


Figure 69. *Flesh[wound],* [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, Close up of central screens

Rather than articulating the violence of self-injury as in *…my beauty…* or *Pinch Point*, *Flesh[wound]* shows the subtlety of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject states, alongside the precarious and uncertain nature of the shift from one to the other. The way this relationship works depends on various things in the individual person's life, however, it is useful to recall Husserl's description of our opposing attitudes or frames of mind that impact this relationship (described in Chapter Four).

An unexpected image emerged from the installation (figure 70). Discovering this image created a sense of wonder in me during the install. It took me a while to understand how this image was being made. I still don't fully understand, but it seemed to be a reflection of the closest projection, on the wall behind the projector. The experience of witnessing this mysterious image facilitated an embodied

sensation of wonder, that I could feel very strongly within my chest. At this point, I experienced my body-as-subject, where I wasn't seeking meaning through my mind, but simply enjoying my embodied selfhood.

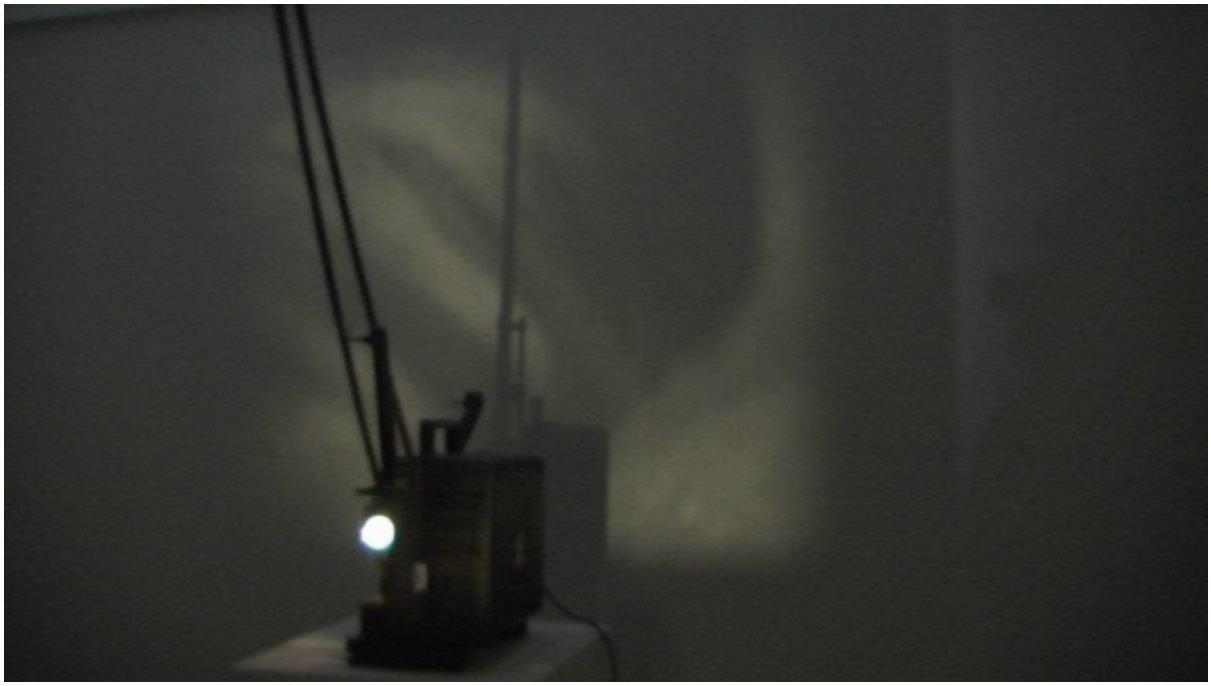


Figure 70. *Flesh[wound],* [16mm installation] University of Plymouth, unexpected reflections on back walls of installation space

Photochemical Flesh[wound]: The making of the film loops

The black and white loop

The film I used for this loop was Fomapan R100 16mm Film, which is a 100 ISO panchromatic black and white reversal film which develops into a positive black and white image, ready for projection. I made this footage through several processes. First, I used pixilation to shoot my body in such a way as to create the jolty, disjointed effect of my movement. Pixilation is a stop-motion filming technique that involves

taking repeated still images frame-by-frame. I set the Bolex 16mm camera on a tripod and used a remote release cable to take a long series of still shots, frame by frame, as I lay on the floor clothed and moved in front of the camera. This was an awkward process, as the cable was only a few feet long, and moving my body and holding the release button at the same time was very uncomfortable. This method is similar to the one used by Smith in the making of *Re:exposure*, discussed in Chapter Three. Whereas her intention is to give the viewer a sense of flesh, mine is to convey a sense of awkward dissociation.

I developed the film using a Fomapan Reversal Processing Kit, specially designed for developing reversal film. It involves a first stage of developing that is the same as regular film processing, then after a bleaching and re-exposure stage, the film is re-developed resulting in a positive image. I then filmed the projection with my HD video camera and played it back on a large monitor. I filmed the playback with my 16mm Bolex and another roll of Kodak Tri-x Reversal film, developing it again with the Fomapan Reversal Processing Kit. As I developed the final round, I rough handled the film as it came out of the developing tank, treating it with less delicacy than usual. The result is a very distorted, not easily distinguishable, rapidly moving body with many flaws in the surface of the film (see figures 55-60).

I discovered during the installation process that this acetate film substrate is more brittle than with colour film which meant that it was less stable running through the projector repeatedly. It would snag and require re-splicing and re-threading. This had an added impact on the installation, where this loop got shorter and shorter due to these physical material qualities of the film. The image becoming more and more

disjointed and jerky but repeating more regularly as the loop got shorter with each snag.

The colour loop

This is filmed using expired Kodak 500T and cross-processed using E6 chemistry as described earlier in *The making of …my beauty*…. Using expired film further complicates the filming and developing stages of the process because the silver halides in the emulsion layer tend to deteriorate over time, this means that more either light is needed in the shooting of the film to ensure it isn't underexposed or that more time is needed in the developer at the processing stage. To facilitate this in the filming process, I reduced the ISO to 250 when I did light meter readings. However, due to this deterioration in silver halides, the colour qualities can be further distorted, sometimes appearing more muted. The use of expired film along with cross-processing can make the results even more unpredictable. But the quality of colour and light can also add a different, less definitive, slightly ethereal dimension to the image. See link for digital version of both black and white and colour loops [link: https://vimeo.com/818655212, password: mybeauty].

The filming of this loop consisted of both single and double exposure processes. The single exposure section was shot in a room with strong sunlight pouring through the window onto the area where I placed my body. The camera was positioned at my head end, pointing downwards from my head towards my feet, into the sunlit areas. This point of view allowed strong light and dark areas in the frame, but also created a quality of softness in the image as it transitions from light to dark. As the camera

rolled, I lay in the sun, as if luxuriating in its warmth, moving from left to right and back again, enjoying the sense of embodiment in the sun's rays.

The double exposure worked in the same way that I describe in the …my beauty… section on page 171. I reduced the aperture one stop for each layer filmed. In this case, I filmed my own body lying down transverse to the lens of the camera, moving in a slow and easy manner, and then I re-exposed the film with fronds of a conifer tree. I cross-processed the film in E6 chemistry as described in *The making of …my beauty…* (pages 169 – 172). The flesh of my back and bottom in this part of the loop come across as very smooth, almost luminescent in pale greyish, pinky, purplish tones, with the light bouncing off my skin as a shiny pearl-like surface. The fronds of the conifer tree moving independently across my fairly still body, as though gently caressing this luminescent flesh. These fronds appear darker but with strong pinks and purples. It isn't directly obvious what this layer over the body is, but as with the single exposure footage, there appears a sense of otherworldliness, where the body and the other materiality is merged.

***Navigating the gap: an analysis of* Flesh[wound]**

As an immersive, haptic installation designed to articulate the body-as-object and the body-as-subject through an embodied experience, *Flesh[wound]* utilises analogue film materiality and processes to represent the two states as separate encounters, while also showing the audience the ways these states interweave. I will now analyse analogue installation's ability to portray this materiality and expand on the notions of

the two states. First, I focus on the body-as-object state, since I have already explored the body-as-subject in my analysis of *Pinch Point*. Second, I examine the interweaving dynamic between the two states. Finally, I explore the relationship between my body, the audience members' bodies and the materiality employed as embodied objects in the installation environment.

This installation makes use of the materiality of analogue 16mm film, the heavy machinery, film loops and the accompanying sound, as well as the clear, clean and heavy Perspex screens which accentuate the spilling, leaking and grinding dirtiness of the projectors in the background. Consequently, in this artwork, immediately as viewers enter the space, they are invited to respond to the work through their bodies, in response to the mechanical sounds along with the constant movement of film through the projectors in the space. In informal conversations during the first exhibition, one viewer, Zanna Markillie, explained their experience of *Flesh[wound]* as follows:

> I remember feeling really impacted by the sound and the loops going round. It was filling the space. I felt like I was inside a space, that immersive quality, that I could walk around and spend time with the different transmissions, and I needed the more peaceful body to regulate or discharge. It was very impactful, I remember feeling close to tears, it's not shock, its body impact… (September, 2019).

Flesh[wound] creates an environment that is physically entered into by the audience and, in Claire Bishop's words, 'insists that you regard this as singular totality' (2010, p. 6). Bishop goes on to say that installation art assumes that an embodied viewer's 'senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision' (2010, p. 6). As with the quote from Markillie above, the audience's embodied experience

has the potential to go beyond the physical range of sensations, towards those not easily definable. This relates to the theory of affect discussed in Chapter Four.

The orientation of the space, including the film loops running up to the ceiling, and the spatial positioning of the projectors and screens as well as the sound echoing throughout the space facilitates a sense of being fully immersed in the installation, thereby bringing the audience's attention to their own bodies. This 'sensory immediacy' creates a 'heightened awareness' (Bishop, 2010, p. 11) of both the viewer's body and that of others in the same space. One viewer mentioned that the layout of the installation allowed them to walk in the shape of the infinity symbol, where the centre space between the screens became the centre of the route. This movement reveals the interrelationship between the two embodied states as the viewer walks within the space, hence introducing the notion that these two states are not binary, but interrelated and connected.

The installation space is intended to evoke an embodied response. As such, it attempts to bypass the viewer's intellectual interest in the work and draw out a heightened physical awareness of the body and its relationship with other bodies (Bishop, 2010, p. 76), including non-human bodies. However, as Merleau-Ponty argues, the viewer's past, present and future are also included in the way they relate with an artwork (Merleau-Ponty, 1961 in Bishop, 2010, p. 76). They bring their past experiences and their thoughts about the future to their engagement with the artwork

in the present moment. All these attributes of the viewer become imprinted on their embodied experience of the artwork.

Flesh[wound] foregrounds an analogue materiality that gives the role of the matter a particular privilege. As Knowles says, by focussing on matter, the installation 'bestows on outdated technology a special material status—a form of objectification that emphasises film's own "to-be-looked-at-ness" in the digital era' (2020, p. 198). Knowles here refers to Laura Mulvey's expression 'to-be-looked-at-ness' to describe the impression materiality has on audiences. This echoes the manner of objectification described by Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) as how the male gaze is projected towards women, with 'their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (1975, p. 11). In the context of this research project, the materiality of analogue film creates a double 'to-be-looked-at-ness', of both the matter in the space and the image on the film loops. I draw on Mulvey's contention that 'cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself' (1975, p. 17). Knowles expands her notion of objectification with regards to analogue practice, thus:

> So long the bearer of fetishised representations, the medium succumbs to an ironic reversal as its mechanical operations, celluloid gleam and intermittent glow indicate an exotic otherness that frames its pastness as a form of beauty. Standing on pristine plinths or polished floors, the film projectors of the gallery installation often seem awkwardly out of place [….] (2020, p. 198).

It is this fascination with materiality and the equivalence to the female objectification that I explored in my previous artworks, *Pinch Point* and *What Lies Beneath*, which

leads me to draw on material feminism[33] to examine the nature of the interrelationship between matters, both human and non-human. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman explain that 'new materialism' overlaps with 'material feminism' (2008, p. 6). They describe the 'material turn' in feminist theory in terms of 'taking matter seriously' (2008, p. 6), maintaining that 'material feminists explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the "environment," without privileging any one of these elements' (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008, p. 7).

In *Flesh[wound]*, it is through the 'intra-action'[34] between the 'phenomena that are material discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological' (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008, p. 5) that the viewer makes sense of the artwork. In order to understand the significance of the agency and potency that the artwork represents, the audience needs to relate with the materiality of the space, including the other human and non-human bodies, as much as with the imagery on the screens. The materiality of projection demands to be related to, through its weight, vibrating power, flashing lights, rushing film loops and whirring machine sounds bouncing off all the walls and objects in the room. Additionally, the audience is invited to walk between and around the hanging Perspex screens placed in the centre of the room. The participants' bodies come very close to not only the physical materiality but also the

[33] Alaimo and Hekman distinguish '"material" feminism—which is emerging primarily from corporeal feminism, environmental feminism, and science studies—from "materialist" feminism, which emerges from, or is synonymous with, Marxist feminism' (2008, p. 18).

[34] Karen Barad introduces the idea of intra-action as a key element in her agential realist framework. She writes that intra-action '*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*' in contrast to the term interaction 'which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction' (2007, p. 33, author's emphasis).

bouncing reflections of the bodies on the screens, and beyond. The corporeal and non-human materiality, therefore, is enfolded in the spectre-like presence of the imagery.

I now turn to the role of the imagery from each film loop to explore what they communicate and how they impact the audiences. This includes an expansion on the theoretical understanding of the embodied states, particularly the body-as-object. My performative writing on page 194 points to the lived experience of the body-as-object or objectified state. One viewer pointed to a similar experience:

> I'm feeling it as a body impact, like there are tears and there's a bit of… not shock, it's so disrupted. Because of the shock of the objectified body in that film, I felt uncomfortable and I felt this sense of emotional impact [places hand on chest], the objectified body felt pained, unsupported, or trapped, in its movements (Markillie, September 2020).

Richard Shusterman contemplates that in situations of doubt or difficulty he begins to perceive his body as something he has and uses, not something he is, pushing it to perform. He goes on to reflect that this state causes 'somatic alienation' (Shusterman, 2008, p. 3). The result in my lived experience is, as Shusterman writes,

> the familiar denigrating objectification of the body as just an instrument (lamentably weak and vulnerable) that merely belongs to the self rather than really constituting an essential expression of selfhood (2008, pp. 3–4).

Shusterman's description of the separation from, and objectification of, the body is similar to what the film loop articulates through the jolty, scarred, marked and jarring film strip. This is further conveyed by a disruption in the experience of time, represented by the effect of this jarring film strip. The black and white loop, with its

jerky, fast moving fractured imagery, might indicate the idea that time is moving very fast, in a disjointed way. For example, Markillie said, in response to watching the film:

> It's flashing and jumping and all those cuts and slashes. There's a confusion or a fragmentation of time. It's layered but jumping across. It's the opposite of continuous. It's more split and… chaotic, disorientation, there isn't a sense of holding (2020).

These words echo my lived experience of the body-as-object state, where I feel trapped in my own estranged experience of being where time moves fast and feels uncontrollable. Conversely, about the colour footage, Markillie said:

> So here I feel I can rest with you, like an exhale, and it's like your body feels safe there, like it feels contained and safe and held, it can be itself, but there's this quality of stillness and rest (September 2020).

In terms of the audience's experience of time, here the work offers a more continuous experience, inviting a fluid and flowing encounter with the film:

> So the sense of time in this one feels continuous, and there's stillness and almost like there's no pressure of time (Markillie, September 2020).

The soft colour tones and the gentle movement of the footage creates a calming effect, inviting the viewer to feel this softness and stillness in their bodies, as described by Markillie above. This experience resonates with Slatman's description of the body-as-subject state, where I have an experience of my own 'me-ness' (2014, p. 72).

I propose that we fluctuate, both consciously and unconsciously, between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject states. In my lived experience, when the objectification becomes unliveable, it leads to intense intrusive thoughts and

embodied feelings of distress. To escape this state, as mentioned earlier, I have previously chosen to use self-injury to return to a greater sense of my own embodiment. This installation invites the viewers to have an embodied experience of the dynamic relationship between the two states, through the interplay of the imagery of the bodies on the screens, the bodies of other audience members and their own bodies, paired with various experiences of time created through the imagery. This embodied experience is further accentuated by the material presence of the projectors whirring in the installation space, the film loops running through the pulleys on the ceiling and the Perspex screens suspended in the centre of the space.

Exploring the intra-action between the two states, I return to Merleau-Ponty's notion of double belongingness, that 'although the touching and touched never completely coincide, they flow over into one another, each having the same capacity, each being of the same flesh, of the same lived body' (Folkmarson Käll, 2009, p. 115). This creates an ambiguous and often misunderstood dual nature that exists between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject. In my lived experience, this duality isn't clear-cut and the transition point is blurry, and there is an interwoven quality between the two, so you can't quite tell where one begins and the other ends. This is resonant with the Möbius strip, where one state inflects into the other, but we can't say at which point this happens exactly. I propose that this dynamic intra-active relationship is best explained through art practice, specifically, through an embodied exploration in *Flesh[wound]*.

As mentioned before, the unexpected reflections that fell onto the walls behind the projectors (figure 70) created a sense of mystery. Shusterman mentions mystery in his description of somatic self-consciousness, where he suggests that it points 'towards the vision of an essentially situated, relational, and symbiotic self rather than the traditional concept of an autonomous self grounded in an individual, monadic, indestructible, and unchanging soul' (2008, p. 8). He further reflects that living through somatic self-consciousness results in a life lived with a wider consciousness beyond just the body. The images on the wall mirror this notion and imply the wider consciousness that exists beyond the body, accessible only through an embodied somatic self-consciousness. I tend to regard these reflections in the context of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's writing:

> Perhaps you can even begin to feel the composure that allows you to let things come, and perhaps you cease to ask what these things mean – because they seem just present and meaningful. Perhaps you even observe how, while you ever so slowly begin to let things emerge, you become part of them (2004, p. 151).

Finally, it is important to discuss *Flesh[wound]* in comparison to the works of other artists. While I have described this as an installation during my analysis, it isn't as clear cut as this. As stated in Chapter Three, my practice creates immersive environments that, I suggest, are at an intersection between installation and expanded cinema. My installations presented in this thesis are created with the same spirit of enquiry that Sheldon Renan and Gene Youngblood utilise in their study of expanded cinema, drawing similarly on the stripped back nature of the materiality of expanded film. Additionally, they consist of the fully immersive haptic environments that Bishop refers to in the context of activating her audience (2010). However, I

recognise that there is some ambiguity in the definitions of both concepts. Indeed, Alan L. Rees calls expanded cinema an 'elastic name' that is 'notoriously difficult to pin down or define' (2011, p. 12), and Alison Butler describes installation art as 'the art form that cannot quite articulate its name' (Butler, 2011, quoted in Knowles, 2020, p. 196). While the ambiguity of both art forms allows artists and audiences alike to make their own interpretations, in this research project it appears that it is the embodied nature of my practice that ties these two forms together.

Fairclough's *Bore Song* (2011), described in Chapter Three, allows for a similar ambiguity. As Knowles explains about Fairclough's installation *Absolute Pitch* (2014), the artist uses 16mm projectors to describe 'emotional intensity through layers of bodily symbolism and corporeal communication' (2011, p. 198). In *Bore Song*, this intensity, that reflects Fairclough's grief at the loss of her sister who died by suicide, reflects in the pared-down nature of the installation and the decisions around location and scale of projectors and projection. The fact that both are placed on the floor, with the film loop threaded through a pulley on the ceiling, allows the audience to contrast the grounded immanence of life with the transcendent meanings that are often ascribed to death. The single note that echoes through the space, in accompaniment with the whirring of the projector, holds that tone of transcendence in partnership with the image projected onto a piece of float glass, which has a similar thickness to the screens in *Flesh[wound]*. The image, just about postcard size and rooted to the floor, is misty and has an otherworldly nature to it, a sense of not being quite of this world. The audience feel haunted in this space, by the presence of the materiality of the film and the sound of the note being sung. These presences resonate more with absence

than presence. In *Flesh[wound]*, the thick screens hang heavy, but also seem to float, creating a paradox of material presence, while reflecting the nature and quality of intra-action. This paradox is, in fact, what my work is articulating: the physical sense of being embodied in juxtaposition with being dissociated, here and not here, perhaps.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter described and analysed the three artworks *…my beauty…*, *Pinch Point* and *Flesh[wound]* within the critical framework of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, new materialism and material feminism, as well as in the context of the artistic methods employed, such as performance, installation and expanded cinema. I further contextualised the artworks through a discussion of other analogue filmmaker artists, such as Uman, Eros, Fairclough and Smith. Each of the artworks analysed here reveals different aspects of my lived experience in self-injury.

Using photochemical filmmaking and my body as an image, *…my beauty…* reveals the role of the actual cutting of my skin. I focus on the skin as a boundary between the world and myself, and how the surface of the film shows the audience the importance of this boundary. The skin becomes the material of agency. In recognising its boundary-defining role, when the skin is cut, I return to the body-as-subject, to a place of peace within myself, wherein I am able to take care of myself. Visualising this process is fundamental to my research question, through which, and

employing material photochemical experimentation, embodied agency is explored in the context of self-injury.

In my analysis of *Pinch Point*, I describe how a performative installation can take the role of the skin further, and examine what is exposed once the skin is cut. I analyse the role of performance in this research project, drawing on Spry's theory of performative autoethnography. Expanding the role of performance in revealing the lived experience of self-injury and making important connections with audiences and beyond, the performance has the capacity to relate the artwork to wider societal issues. I also reference Schechner's thinking on the points of contact between anthropology – specifically, his study of ritual – and performance, uncovering the further role of the audience and how they relate to the artwork. Working through what Schechner describes as '[t]ransformation of being and/or consciousness' (1985, p. 4), I discovered that audiences are impacted by the live presence in the artwork. The second point of contact, 'intensity of performance' (1985, p. 10) is articulated through the accumulation and repetition of live action in the performance, which builds a sense of unease and disturbance in the audience. The violence of self-injury and the vulnerability of the embodied self that is exposed through self-jury is realised more fully with live presence. *Pinch Point* takes the role of the skin further as an active agent in self-injury, one that already has the marks of self-objectification written upon it. This is illustrated by the use of found footage. Additionally, the transition between one state to the other through the cut does not take place in a single moment. This artwork thus portrays the transition as a long and slow process, where there is a kind of pushing through from the body-as-subject. It seems that when living as the body-

as-object becomes, over time, intolerable, the feeling of discomfort grows until there is no other choice left but to cut my own skin. Finally, the artwork reveals the tender, vulnerable revelation of the embodied subject. I explained this notion by using Slatman's expression 'me-ness' and Folkmarson Käll's 'embodied selfhood'. *Pinch Point* shows how my skin holds me away from myself through self-objectification, but eventually gives way to the sensations of my sensorial lived body.

Flesh[wound] expands on the concept of a transition point, exploring the dynamic relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject through analogue installation. This artwork extends beyond the role of self-injury in facilitating the transition between the two states, asking the audience to explore this as a non-dual, fluid, indistinct and leaky dynamic. Drawing on the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the materiality of the analogue technology (Knowles, 2020, p.41) in the context of Mulvey's use of the same term, I analysed the artwork through material feminism. This immersive installation allows audiences to navigate the whole space and to experience the interconnectedness of the bodies in the space, including their own. The relationship between the imagery on the screens and the bodies in the installation space marks the importance of the transition as a regular human occurrence, rather than as something unique that I do as someone who has suffered childhood trauma and found it the only solution to help her survive. *Flesh[wound]* investigates the body-as-object and the body-as-subject states that philosophers such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty have articulated in their writing. However, through visual, spatial and embodied means, I can invite audiences to experience this double belongingness as a normal event. What isn't normal or functional is the

strategy that I, and others, have employed to navigate our way back to the experienced body when living with the objectification becomes impossible.

Throughout this chapter, I questioned the relationship between installation practice and expanded cinema, aligning with Knowles on the ambiguity of both practices, while also making the proposition that my practice sits at the intersection between the two, where the connecting factor is the embodiment of the audience.

Finally, this practice research has revealed a breadth of understanding of self-injury, which has previously been clinically problematised through the objectification of 'sufferers' without situating them in a broader cultural context (Steggals, 2015, pp. 14-18). My thesis has important relevance to the fields of sociology, psychology and philosophy for allowing an articulation of my lived experience through art practice.

CONCLUSION

The thesis in summary

In this practice research project, I explored the extent to which moving image, sound and performance, in the context of art installation, can reveal an embodied and theoretical understanding of the processes and functions of self-injury. I also investigated the ways in which art practice can offer new understandings of the lived experience of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject in the context of self-injury.

My research revealed insights into the nature of self-injury, and mental health more broadly, through installation art. Reflecting on Jane Kilby's assertion that self-injury is impossible 'to bear witness to' (2001, p. 124), I established an art practice that made it possible for audiences to 'bear witness' to self-injury in meaningful and relatable ways, through visual, sound and material means. The artworks presented in this thesis contribute to new knowledge, both in art practice and in the sense of potential treatment options for people suffering from mental health problems, and specifically those who self-injure.

This research project has uncovered the anomalies present in the act of self-injury. As a woman who has carried out self-injury, I recognise that I have acted out of the lived experience of the paradox that I am both object and subject, and that my experience of dissociation is one of separation from, although felt in, my body. I therefore analysed the processes involved in self-injury and its implications,

examining the different dynamics at play prior, during and after self-injury as associated with the body, that is, the corporeal matter of my lived female body.

The idea that self-injury is 'part curse and part cure' (Steggals, 2015, p. 2–3) helped me underpin a theme of paradoxes that emerged throughout this investigation. My research thus articulated the ambiguity of the body, demonstrating how we can relate to our bodies as both an object and a subject. As Elizabeth Grosz maintains, 'the body is a most peculiar "thing", for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing' (1994, p. xi). This results in us being able to experience our bodies as 'an object able to take itself and others as subjects' (Grosz, 1994, p. xi). I revealed, through art installation, the paradox of the experience of dissociation, described by Judith Herman, as both a numbness *and* 'a feeling of unbearable agitation' (1992, p. 109). That is to say, we feel *in our bodies* the experience of dissociation *from our bodies*.

As I established in Chapter One, this research is marked by an absence of appropriate definitions that describe the body and the embodied experience beyond the mind/body dualism. As Grosz points out, there is no language to describe such concepts that doesn't automatically revert to this polarisation and there is a need for a greater understanding of what she describes as 'embodied subjectivity' (1994, p. 22). I likewise encountered the difficulties pertaining to language and terminology, and my aim throughout has been to use art practice to help find new definitions and modes of articulation.

In its convergent use of tacit and somatic knowledge, the embodied onto-epistemological methodology of my research showed the ambiguity of the body by likening it to the Möbius strip. As explained in Chapter Two, this methodology particularly considers the potential for the discovery of knowledge through acknowledging my own perceiving body (Bacon, 2012, p. 11) as an integral element in discursive engagement. I began my research with a regular practice of exploration of my own embodied experience, through a direct engagement with my sensorial body, movement practice, meditation and then through performative writing. My performative writing gave voice to what my body experienced in the lead-up, during and after cutting my own skin. Therefore, an explication of my lived experience through movement practice, performative writing and art practice allowed me to become aware of the underlying reasons and the embodied textures surrounding the cutting of my skin. Consequently, the details of the three phases of self-injury emerged.

I mapped my own experience against the historical (Chaney, 2017; Favazza, 1996), clinical (Klonsky, 2007, 2015; Nock, 2009, 2014; Taylor et al., 2018) and sociological (Chandler, 2015; Steggals, 2015) positions. Further investigation revealed interesting conflicts between both clinical and sociological approaches to self-injury. First, Peter Steggals reports that the use of the term 'dissociation' shifts the focus onto the individual, rather than including the wider society within which the person who self-injures lives. He goes on to describe this as an objectivist approach, whereby the person who self-injures is treated as an object through a medicalised lens (Steggals, 2015, pp. 18–25). Steggals redefines dissociation as estrangement, which allows for

estrangement from family, culture and society, or a combination thereof (2015, pp. 128–130). This proposition diverts the issue away from the individual being the *problem* towards the acknowledgement of wider cultural issues. My research project considers the use of both terms, dissociation and estrangement, because in essence dissociation, while descriptive of a broad range of disorders, describes an individual's sense of separation *from* their body, but experienced *through* their body. Estrangement, on the other hand, can be situated more firmly within the broader society. The second conflict surfacing in these texts is the omission of the body in studies, as reported by Amy Chandler (2015), Steggals (2015) and Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (2011), all of whom investigate an act which is enacted on the body but is not considered in the context of the body, and the consequent misunderstandings and mistreatment of self-injury.

To sum up, the three main processes contributing to this embodied onto-epistemological methodology included: 1) an embodied enquiry comprised of movement practice, meditation and writing practice; 2) theoretical engagement with this embodied enquiry; and 3) the artistic practice research.

The autoethnographic methods of performative writing and video making I employed provided a deep appreciation of the relationship between the actor and the actant in my lived experience of self-injury (Chandler, 2015, p. 28). Phenomenological theorists, Edmund Husserl (1989) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), along with feminist and new materialist theorists, including Grosz (1994), Karen Barad

(2007) and Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008), informed my corporeal understanding and articulation of this relationship, of the actor and the actant, through the art installations presented in this thesis. I drew on Husserl's theory of *Leib* and *Körper* (1989), along with Merleau-Ponty's reframing of the latter in what he refers to as 'double-belongingness' (1968, p. 137). Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's theories informed my art practice which established that, in the act of self-injury, I am the subject that is doing the cutting and the object that is cut.

Analogue materiality provided me with a physical way to understand my own corporeality alongside that of the materiality of film. Drawing on material feminism (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008), I discovered an equivalent of the body in film, as described in the analysis of *Scratching Below the Surface* in Chapter Four. The artwork *…my beauty…* revealed how the emulsion on the surface of the film could be equated with my own skin. The body of the projectors in *What Lies Beneath* in Chapter Four and *Flesh[wound]* in Chapter Five likewise conveyed the material nature of the body.

I explicated the interactive relationship between objective and subjective bodies by employing the Möbius strip as a point of reference. I used Grosz's modelling of the Möbius strip to explain my understanding of the mind and the body, as well as the interiority and exteriority of their relationship, where the binary isn't clear cut but is, in fact, a subtle interplay between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject. As the art practice aspect of this research developed, I began to see how important the

Möbius strip became in articulating this interplay, and this can be seen in my presentation of *Flesh[wound]* in Chapter Five. The embodied onto-epistemological methodology that I developed echoed the qualities of the Möbius strip, and the layout particularly of *Flesh[wound]* invited a Möbius strip-like movement through the space on behalf of the audience, articulating the blurry boundary between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject.

Contribution to knowledge

Embodiment revealed through art installation

Scratching Below the Surface illuminated the three key phases of self-injury – pre-, during and post-cutting – through an embodied lens which formed an important foundation for the articulation of the embodied onto-epistemological methodology. Through the execution of the three-roomed installation, described in Chapter Four, it became clear that each phase of self-injury can be mapped onto the experience of the body-as-object and the body-as-subject. Room 1 represented the body-as-object, Room 3 represented the body-as-subject and Room 2 represented the transition point between the two. The artwork also pointed to the ways dissociation plays a role in self-injury and its relationship to these states as defined by Husserl. *Scratching Below the Surface* also revealed a gap in my understanding of the transition point between the two states, marking the moment of the cut. It helped me form questions about the affective processes at work between the audience and the artwork, through embodied engagement with sound, analogue film and performance installation.

The female body and self-injury

Using found footage and the hand-processed footage of my body, *What Lies Beneath* communicated the underlying reasons that I, as a woman, would potentially enact such a violence on my skin. Both the found footage and the hand-processed film represented embodiment in opposing ways. The artwork achieved this effect through projecting the object and the subject onto the same screen from opposite sides, resulting in a visual juxtaposition of these embodied states. I visualised the gendered nature of self-injury in *What Lies Beneath* by employing found footage of an old 16mm glamour film to realise the experience of the objectified body of a woman (Chapter Four). This artwork affirmed Young's contention that 'the modalities of feminine bodily existence have their root in the fact that feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing – a fragile thing, […] a thing that exists as *looked at and acted upon*' (2005, p. 39), and that 'the woman lives her body as *object* as well as subject' (2005, p. 44).

The potential for attributing gender to the materiality of analogue film in my practice research was revealed through an examination of the artworks *Reel Time* by Annabel Nicholson and *Aperture Sweep* by Gill Eatherley. Both artworks employ the machinery of the projectors alongside the artists' live presence, using tools that represent domestic labour in order to mark the 'gendered thresholds' (White, 2011, p. 34) that are embedded in patriarchal society. This binary was represented also in *Scratching Below the Surface* where I used a sewing unpicker, signified as a tool for 'women's work', to scratch the emulsion of the film (Chapter Four).

Skin, boundary and agency

The photochemical properties of 16mm film practice resulted in varying scars, scratches and watermarks appearing on the film's surface in *…my beauty…* (Chapter Five). I revealed the importance of skin as a boundary between myself and the world through these imperfections. My skin was the signifier of my internalised objectification and the externalised inscription of the object of being a woman, both 'looked at and acted upon' (Young, 2005, p. 39). The act of cutting the surface which represented this objectification conveys the act of taking back control, of reclaiming my own agency, and thereby returning to my own subjective body.

The live body and self-injury

Employing performative autoethnographic methods throughout my research project helped me discover the ways in which the audience can be impacted by liveness, and by doing so generated a greater understanding of the role of the body in self-injury. In the live performances of *Scratching Below the Surface* (Chapter Four) and *Pinch Point* (Chapter Five), I employed two of Richard Schechner's points of contact between ritual and performance, that is, '[t]ransformation of being and/or consciousness' (1985, p. 4) and 'intensity of performance' (1985, p. 10), to create a heightened embodied audience experience. Both artworks established the important role that ritual plays in performance installation in order to reveal an embodied understanding of self-injury. The audience's physical presence in both these artworks was crucial for witnessing the transformation of being and the intensity of the performance.

In *Pinch Point*, I demonstrated a clear contrast between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject. The transition between the two states was articulated through the entire performance installation, not as a single point in time, but something that takes time, that is felt through the body, as the embodied self pushes herself through the objectified body, longing for its presence to be felt, until the act of cutting reveals it fully as a tender and vulnerable presence. Consequently, audience members became more aware of the corporeal sensations of this transition as represented in the performance.

Inflecting object and subject

My research explored the dynamic relationship between the body-as-object and the body-as-subject, revealing the nature of the transition between the two as a non-dual, fluid, indistinct and leaky dynamic, and I articulated this embodied transition using the materiality of analogue technology. This was particularly visible in *Flesh[wound]* (Chapter Five), in which the audience navigated the installation space, through and around the heavy materiality of the projectors and screens, with images projected onto the screens. As such, the audience members were moving across the articulation of object and subject and could experience their own embodied relationship with them. This artwork therefore demonstrated the connection between subjecthood and objecthood beyond the single issue of self-injury. In this way, it communicated to the audience that these states are purely natural, and ones that we navigate unconsciously in our daily lives. I argue that audiences are able to grasp this complex dynamic when it is articulated through 16mm film installation and experienced through embodied presence, rather than through theoretical texts.

Installation and expanded cinema: the intersection

It is important to note the intersection between installation practice and expanded cinema. In Chapter Five, I explored both and the ambiguities in their definitions. I employed Claire Bishop's model of activated spectatorship (2010) in order to bring the audience's embodied senses to their immediate awareness. However, Youngblood (1970) and Renan's (1967) foundational writing excites me when I reflect on my research through the lens of expanded cinema. They assert that expanded cinema really means expanded consciousness. In Youngblood's words, '[e]xpanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming' (1970, p. 41). Youngblood and Renan's proposition has allowed me to develop a rich and lively art practice that examines the subtleties of the body through my lived experience of self-injury.

Affect is another important mechanism I employed to help articulate these embodied states, as discussed in Chapter Four. There was an impact on the audience members' bodies within the installation environment which included the physical presence of the machinery, with the accompanying sounds, the heavy Perspex screens and the presence of the live body. Thus, I utilised the quality of affects – as Simon O'Sullivan says, 'you can only experience them' (2001, p. 126) – in order to bypass the audience's rational minds when witnessing my artworks and facilitate embodied responses rather than intellectual interpretations of the work. Therefore, in the process of feeling the affects produced by the artwork, the audience was invited (unknowingly) into the body-as-subject state, or their own 'embodied selfhood' (Folkmarson Käll, 2009, p. 125).

Beyond the bounds of art practice

Using an embodied onto-epistemological methodology for art research has resulted in a rich project with important outcomes and revelations about the nature of self-injury in the context of embodiment. Furthermore, I propose that this thesis has also revealed important knowledge that has significant relevance to the fields of sociology and psychology. It became clear through this research that the body-as-object and the body-as-subject are normal and functional states of being. I have previously chosen to cut my skin in order to find my way back to my subjective body; however, there are other, less extreme ways to do this. Furthermore, there are other responses to this unliveable and dissociative state, such as eating disorders, alcoholism and drug use.

By describing the emotional difficulty that we experience in our bodies as *mental* health, I argue, we are conforming to the body/mind binary that my research has attempted to dispel. I do not deny the presence of extreme disorders that rightfully are classified as mental health concerns; however, the use of the term 'mental health' in common parlance discounts the body's role. If someone is 'visually distressed', they are feeling emotions in their body which, I argue, are healthy and necessary and not a mental health problem. This term further confirms Steggals's (2015) assertion that the medicalised objectivist paradigm is unhelpful to people who self-injure or demonstrate other behaviours resulting from living through an objectified (or dissociated) state.

Future research

Going forward and following this thread, I am working on a socially engaged research project entitled *Dialogues of Disorder*. This is in collaboration with Dr Tom Baugh, artist researcher and Head of Art at Falmouth University, who is also one of my current PhD supervisors and was my Director of Studies for four years from 2016 to 2020. We have partnered with Livewell Southwest, a social enterprise delivering health and social care provision across Devon and Cornwall, and two research participants to explore the embodied responses of both obsessive-compulsive disorder and self-injury through filmic installation practice. This takes my research into a broader context than my own lived experience within the interdisciplinary field of Medical Humanities, where it can influence clinicians and medical practitioners.

Additionally, I am interested in investigating the role of ritual in self-injury and mental health in general through artistic research. My doctoral study revealed the role of ritual in self-injury, but the scope of the project was such that I was unable to include a deeper examination of this concept, which appears to be a rich territory for future research. I am also drawn to Astrida Neimanis's theory of posthuman feminist phenomenology, in *Bodies of Water*, where she maintains:

> Our wet matters are in constant process of intake, transformation, and exchange—drinking, peeing, sweating, sponging, weeping. Discrete individualism is a rather dry, if convenient, myth.
>
> For us humans, the flow and flush of waters sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves (2016, p. 4).

My practice research pointed to the leaky boundary between embodied states through the materiality of all the bodies present. This leaves me thirsty for exploration into the watery connectivity possible with this other matter.

AFTERWORD

The works analysed in Chapter Five were installed in September 2023 for examination. This text was written in response to the experience of this installation, and read out to the examiners at my viva voce.

The intimacy of intra-action

I watch the film as it runs through the borrowed projector. It looks beautiful, soft, muted tones, slow deliberate movement. I can feel the relief in my body. It is the last piece of the install. Done…I'm happy.

Then, slowly, I see what looks like a droplet of water emerging on the image, it seems to run down the centre of the screen, like a tear rolling down a cheek. I think there must be something in the gate of the projector, some kind of condensation, or dust? I turn it off to look. But this borrowed projector has an automatic feed, one which I can't quite work out and can't see into the threading mechanism. I do a lot of blowing, and puffing, and then rethread, with a little prayer. I console myself that these little prayers help. Its Saturday, by the way, the examiners are coming on Monday. This is the end of a month's work of installation.

I rethread, the little droplets are still there. And getting worse. I can feel panic rising through my body. I've had sleepless nights these last few weeks worrying about this particular reel of film. You see, it needs to be perfect, to be beautifully pristine. I think

of the Film Prayer at the start of my thesis. “cherish me, and I delight and instruct the world”

The film and I become intimately connected in this moment. I reach out and gently caress the film as it runs through the projector, this beautiful colour film, filmed in my hotel room in Berlin, during my residency with LaborBerlin, developed in their dark rooms in the presence of the lovely Melissa Dullius, this film has travelled many miles. I reach out and caress this film, hold it (as you are NOT meant to do) between my thumb and forefinger. I love how it feels. Soft and strong, shiny on one side and smooth matt on the other. This time it feels different. As I feel a strong ridge running along the centre of this film, that is so crucial to the whole of this installation, my body freezes, I feel a jolt in the centre of my body, it spreads across my chest, this feels like both a freezing and a flash of heat all at once. Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god…..

It slowly dawns on me that this borrowed projector, or how I am threading it, is doing this to the film. You see, mostly I’m self-taught, we all are, aren’t we? We work out how to do this analogue film thing ourselves, by our desire to make the work that we want to make, and simply due to the lack of people around who can help. I have no idea how to thread this projector, I guessed, and somehow, I did it wrong…it didn’t scratch the test strip. My mind is racing….and then, I slow down, sit on the floor, and feel my body sink, feel the panic, fear and heat ebb away, being replaced with a sense of collapse, giving up and I let the tears come. I consider letting this whole show go, letting…..it…..go.

It seems this film strip has become, in the words of the Film Prayer, bruised and wounded beyond the power to heal.

In my thesis on page 210 I say “corporeal and non-human materiality is enfolded in the spectre-like presence of the imagery”. . (p.210). In this moment of the install, I can truly see how this has manifested in my artwork. The materiality of my film, the projector, the light shining onto the screens, are, in this moment, evidence of the intra-action that Karen Barad refers to, signifying what she describes as the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies”.

Throughout my analysis I have referred to reclaiming my own agency through the cutting of my skin, the equivalence of skin with the emulsion of the film, and I have glanced into the notion of entangled agencies. Here, in this room, entangled agencies are revealing themselves with more weight, power and undeniability.

This film strip is now a perfect articulation of the non-human, human, corporeal and technological coming together and acting upon each other.

This agency reveals itself further in this installation. I have always known that the Tri-X black and white film running through the projector at the other end of this installation tends to be more brittle, to snag on the sprockets of the projector. I want to make sure this doesn’t happen this time. I splice the film so carefully, I clean each end of the join, I hold tenderly, and apply the tape as one might a plaster on a lover’s

wound. There is tenderness, love and a careful respect. Splicing has never felt so intimate.

These intra-actions reveal the potential to interpret the agency of materials according to my own understanding and equivalence of Self Injury. The scratching of the film might be seen as tears running down the image, the film is now scarred as my skin remains scarred with the actions I have taken on my skin through my life. As the machine tears through the sprocket holes, it makes the film shorter, more stuttering, more repetitive, more uncomfortable for audiences to stay with, through this I can make the equivalence of the difficulty in being in a state of dissociation, in the body as object state.

In summary, the intra-action between the bodies in the space create an intimacy in the installation for me as the artist and invites the same intimacy for the audience. This installation reveals more fully than previously, the agentic potential of all the bodies in the space. The space between reveals the depth of agentic realism that Barad refers to possible through art practice.

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APPENDIX ONE

'Subjectivity and Affect: Uncomfortable Bedfellows', *Theorem, Theory as Practice and Practice as Theory*, Cambridge School of Art Doctoral Research Publication, 2019

KAREN ABADIE

14 *Subjectivity and Affect: Uncomfortable Bedfellows*

I never ask myself "who am I?" I ask myself "who are I?" (qui sont-je?). Who can say who I are, how many I are, which I is the most I of my I's?...we are all the ages, those we have been, those we will be, those we will not be, we journey through ourselves... We: are, Nous Sommes (Cixous cited in Sellers, 1994:xv-11).

Facing Image: x

SUBJECTIVITY IS AT THE HEART OF MY RESEARCH. However, throughout the life of my PhD research I have repeatedly questioned the personal nature of my research methodology. This is because it often requires me to reveal some of my deepest secrets and vulnerabilities, which regularly lead to awkward responses in my audiences. Consequently, I have become intrigued by this drive to research issues that reveal my own vulnerabilities. However, I suggest subjective research methodologies have significant value in the practice-as-research field.

Audiences, to both formal presentations of my research, and installations of my practice research, respond in various ways to the research subject matter. One audience member couldn't enter the installation space after hearing me talk about my enquiry into self-injury;[1] he had gone pale and felt

[1] *Non-Suicidal Self-injury (NSSI) or deliberate self-injury can be defined as "the intentional and direct injuring of one's body tissue without suicidal intent" (Herpertz, 1995; Muehlenkamp cited in Klonsky, 2007:227).*

faint, thinking I was going to cut my skin as part of the performance. I would like to assure readers, that I do not cut my own skin as part of my practice or research. While this act has its place in some live art performances, with obvious examples including Franco B and Ron Athey, I do not believe it is the best way to articulate an embodied experience of self-injury. Instead, I will illustrate the experience of cutting my skin by relating three examples of performative written text to three installations of my work.

The particular response by the audience member mentioned above is key to an intrinsically linked issue in my research; that of affect. A fundamental part of my enquiry is to ask how I can articulate to audiences the lived experience of self-injury through immersive haptic installation. Audiences witnessing my installations are invited to *feel* this work in their bodies in a similar way that I endure myself, when in the processes of self-injuring. I suggest this experience is transmitted through *affect*. That is, how we empathise through our bodies when we see someone around us sustain strong physical or emotional impact. However, for reasons that will become clear through this essay, subjectivity and affect are not comfortable bedfellows. Lisa Blackman (2012), author of *Immaterial Bodies*, discussing the affective capacities of bodies, suggests the enquiry into affect is often positioned in opposition to the psychological subject, and is specifically cited as a reason against the need for theories of subjectivity.

In this essay, I will discuss the challenge of articulating the subjective experience of self-injury to an audience through affect. In so doing, I suggest the relevance of subjective enquiry to the wider practice research community, but also, the necessity of this subjectivity in articulating my lived experience to audiences in order to answer my research questions. In essence, I put my lived experience at the centre of my practice research. Without myself as subject, my research goes nowhere.

Often, while presenting to an academic community, I feel a sense of shame, of lack, of being less than; in that, I am exposing myself, coming out to the world as a self-harmer, as someone who has struggled in life. Feminist, Hélène Cixous, suggests that subjectivity is often confused with individualism and is viewed with suspicion (Sellers, 1994). Individualism is often coupled with accusations of narcissism and self-indulgence, and is considered to privilege the individual, rather than seeing the individual in context with others. I believe subjectivity has an important role to play in academic research, which I'll describe in more depth below.

SUBJECTIVE RESEARCH – SELF-INDULGENCE OR FRUITFUL ENQUIRY

So, what do I mean by subjectivity? Two key theorists that have helped me define this are Elizabeth Grosz and Richard Shusterman. In an attempt to articulate the subject beyond the body/mind duality, Elizabeth Grosz uses the Möbius Strip (Fig. 1), which she borrowed from Lacan, as a model to describe how the body/mind subject might best be served:

> *Bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Möbius Strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another (Grosz, 1994:xii).*

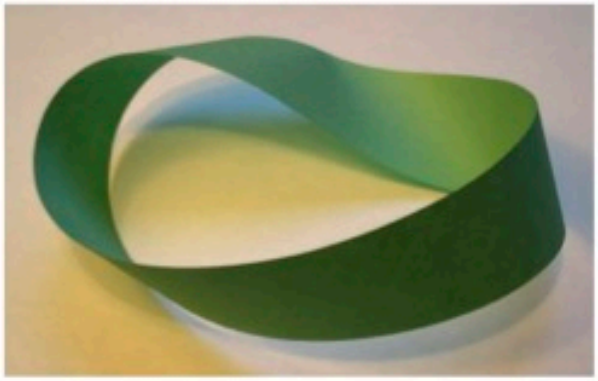

Fig. 1

Fig. 1: Möbius Strip, photograph by David Benbennick

Richard Shusterman (2008) in his text, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, proposes new methodologies for researching the body. He suggests we are both a subject that experiences the world and an object within the world. Shusterman (2008:3) says, "I thus both *am* body and *have* a body."

Grosz (1994:xi) sees the body itself is problematic in its definition and scope, suggesting that the body is a "most peculiar thing," because it is not merely a thing, but neither does it quite manage to "rise above the status of a thing." This quote by Grosz articulates my experience:

> *Thus [the body] is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. (Grosz, 1994:xi)*

When I began my research, I was motivated by the idea that I could somehow help raise awareness of the issues surrounding self-injury and reduce stigmatisation, both within a clinical environment but also in society at large. I soon discovered, from practice research scholars, Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2010), that through personally-situated practice my body held the memory, knowledge and insight that would lead to an articulation of my lived experience of self-injury.

Research into my subjective experience of self-injury has led me to uncover the ambiguities that I believe exist in our understanding of being embodied, wherein I discovered how I experience myself as both object and subject at the same time. This became the starting point for my practice as research.

Much of my explicit reflection initially came through autoethnography, allowing me to articulate the tension between internal perceptions, which are my own lived experiences, and external perceptions – how society interprets self-injury. As Adams et al (2015:1) suggest, autoethnographic stories "are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience." This is the value of subjective research. Subjectivity becomes irreplaceable when we can relate our own experience to shed light on broader cultural or societal concerns.

I began my research with performative writing. Author, Ronald Pelias (2014:8) suggests that performative writing serves "as a method for evoking human experiences." This method gave me direct entry into my lived experience of self-injury, revealing itself first through physical sensation before forming itself as constructed sentences. Pelias (2004:50) recognises, as my writing confirmed to me, that "remembering begins in the body, in vague feelings, in the sensuous before it claims its story." Through personally-situated methodologies, I put the viewer and myself at the centre of the research, so that new thinking could emerge through reflexive and analytical means at each step. The words that emerged illuminated the role of my body in this enquiry and thereby the importance of the body in my subjective research methodology (Fig. 2, 3, and 4). The texts below elucidate Grosz's equivalence of the Mobius strip with the mind/body subject.

Fig. 2

> *"I melt, I become wallpaper*
> *A deep sense of emptiness, a tragic emptiness, a sense of despair and pointlessness of isolation*
> *Bleak and dark, a rage inside, a dark dark feeling of rage that wants to destroy itself*
> *An absolute total and utter implosion"*
>
> *Extract from Performative Writing, July 2016*

Fig. 3

> *"It was the middle of the night, I took a glass from my kitchen, I put it between newspaper and stood on it until I felt the glass crack. I fingered my way through the shards until I found the very one which I knew, from experience, would do the job at hand. I sat on the edge of my bed, I could feel my heart pumping in my*

ears, as I gently caressed the soft skin of the inside of my right arm. I took the sharp glass shard and pulled it over my skin. I can hear the sound of the glass scraping and dragging across the skin."

Extract from Performative Writing, October 2016

Fig. 4

"I could feel the pain melt through my body, I could feel the sense of tight distress, panic, desperation, drain away as the blood began to flow, allowing great sobs to shake through and then a sense of relief and peace as I lay down to rest, quieter inside now."

Extract from Performative Writing, January 2017

These words gave me an intimate sense of what it was to be in my body at three key stages in my lived experience of self-injury. Cixous (1976:880) entreats women to "Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth." The performative writing brought into my awareness what my unconscious already knew, and paved the way for the next phase of my practice research.

FROM SUBJECTIVITY TO AFFECT

> *There is no denying, or deferring, affects. They are what make up life, and art…Affects are…the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification. But what can one say about affects? Indeed, what needs to be said about them?…You cannot read affects, you can only experience them. (O'Sullivan, 2001:126)*

My intention in this section is to portray for the reader the role of affect within my installation practice, as situated in the context of subjective research. In my research into affect, I was struck by the number of authors who position affect outside of the subject, in that they suggest affect has nothing to do with subjectivity. In fact, as Caroline Williams (2010:246) suggests, affect is "de-subjectifying" and for Brian Massumi (2002), it is considered pre-personal[2], autonomous, non-intentional and a force that exceeds the psychological subject. For Williams and Massumi, affect is simply a movement of state through and between both objects and subjects. Williams, influenced by Spinoza, claims that:

> *affects are forms of encounter, they circulate – sometimes ambivalently but always productively – between and within bodies (of all kinds), telling us something important about the power of affect to unravel subjectivity and modify the political body. (Williams, 2010:246)*

Williams' suggestion that affect has the power "to unravel subjectivity" is interesting in the context of my research. My contention is somewhat different. My view is that subjectivity has the potential to contort affect. In essence, we disrupt affect through our own subjectivity. Our subjectivity relates with affect through judgement and interpretation. However, I suggest that it is impossible to simply experience affect, without letting it filter through our own subjectivity, without us making sense or meaning of what we are experiencing. As O'Sullivan's quote above suggests, affect is to be experienced not to be read or understood. According to Seigworth and Gregg (2010:2), affect describes "a body's capacity to affect and be affected" and it is our own subjectivity that determines how affect is received, interpreted and acted upon.

Affect is pre-subjective, pre-personality.

[2] According to Massumi (2002), affective processes do not require a subject; suggesting that affect is felt through purely autonomic reactions. In fact, when it is registered by the human subject, as Blackman (2012) suggests, it is often closed down or arrested in some way. In other words, affect bypasses cognition and is experienced before it's translated into emotion or feeling (Blackman, 2012). We can therefore describe affect as pre-personal or pre-subjective, that it is registered before we become consciously aware of it and, in fact, once we do become aware of it, it's effect changes through our interpretations of it.

Julia Kristeva, who served on the jury for the 1993 Venice Biennale and reflected on her observations in *Sens et Non Sens de la Revolte/The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (Kristeva, 1996), suggests that in an installation the body "in its entirety is asked to participate through its sensations, through vision obviously, but also hearing, touch, on occasions smell" (Kristeva, 1996:27-8). Kristeva's writings about those installations articulate the same concerns which have led me to choose installation as an artistic form, in order to reflect my subjective experience. As mentioned earlier, my performative writing revealed three key stages of the lived experience of a body in the act of self-injury. In *Scratching Below the Surface* (Abadie, 2017), a performative installation at Royal William Yard, Plymouth, I articulate these three stages in three interlinked intimate spaces through a selection of visual and sound interventions. As the viewer enters the first room they are immersed in darkness, while hearing loud irregular searing scratching and low rumbling sounds. These sounds are not, as yet, identifiable. The sound, and the encompassing darkness encourage the viewer to encounter sensations transmitted through affect in their body.

Sound is a very particular medium to enhance the transmission of affect in an installation. Salomé Voegelin (2010:4),[3] author of *Listening to Noise and Silence*, argues that listening is not a receptive mode so much as a method of exploration, a mode of "walking through the soundscape/the sound work." She says that what we hear is "discovered not received" and "this discovery is generative, a fantasy: always different and subjective and continually, presently now" (Voegelin, 2010:4). Additionally, John Wynne speaking at London College of Communications in 2010, suggests, "aural phenomena undo the lines between public and private," (Wynne cited in Elwes, 2015:208).

I use sound in my installation practice in ways that reverberates in the space in such a way that generates sensation

[3] *Voegelin is Reader in Sound Arts at the London College of Communication, UAL.*

in audience member's bodies through affect, and in so doing, brings the audience into the present moment. These sounds are not representational; they cannot be understood. Audience members can only be at the affect of the sound.[4] This is the pre-subjective nature of sound. The audience is having, as Kristeva puts it, a "real experience" (1996:28), which is not involved in making sense of, or trying to identify the sound. I refer to this as a direct experience.

It is this pre-subjective experience, which is beyond understanding; that makes these sensations so heightened it becomes difficult for the audience to endure. Through the installation, this attempts to replicate the state that I describe in Fig. 1.

In my experience, just before self-injury, I am in a heightened state of emotion, in psychological terms I am dissociated from my body. In this state my mind and my body are separate, with the exception of the extreme feeling of arousal. These feelings appear to be so extreme that I feel a need to halt them. In this piece, the sound is so intense for audience members that they have to leave the space; in effect, they have to act in order to make it bearable.

In the second space the audience encounters me as I scratch into 16mm film leader with a sewing stitch-unpicker. The sound is transmitted into the first room via a contact microphone. The leader is threaded into a projector, which is running. At first I'm in the dark, because the film leader is solid black therefore obscuring the light from the projector. As I scratch into the leader, light begins to fall on my hair and face, and, the more I scratch the more I become visible. The space is activated by the whirring mechanics of the projector with the film flowing through it, and with my own presence.

In this second room, I suggest the film surface can become synonymous with the skin's surface, as the "bearer or scene of meaning" (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001:2). So, in the same

[4] *In this installation, one audience member reportedly lifted his shirt while standing close to the speaker so that he could feel the sound reverberate inside his body. Another audience member reported that the sounds made her think of monsters and other 'mythical' creatures, and as such for her, engendered a sense of curiosity and playfulness.*

Fig. 5 & 6: Scratching Below the Surface, second room ©2017 Karen Abadie. Photo: K. Parker

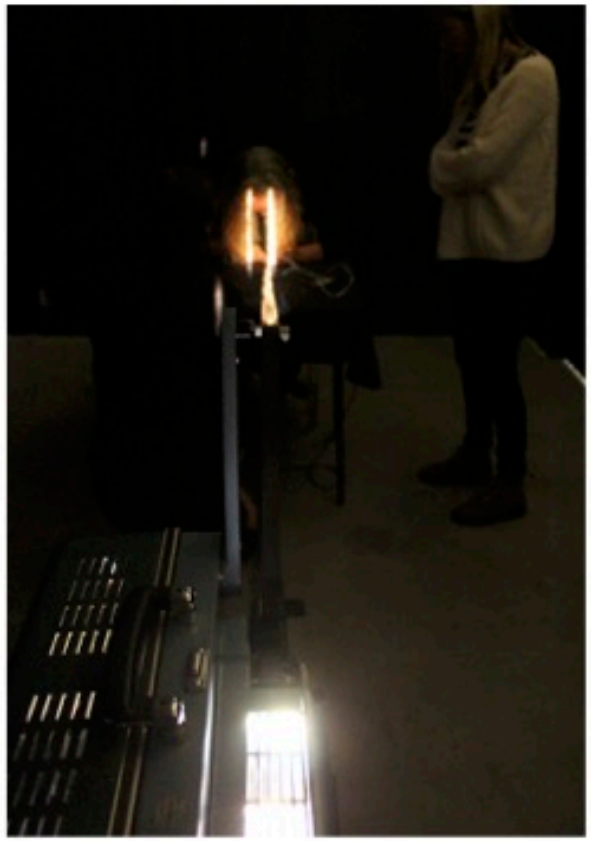

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

way that the skin's surface can tell a story or reveal a history, as my inner right forearm shows, the surface of the film can tell a similar or equivalent story. In the act of witnessing the cutting into the 'skin' of the film, the audience is invited to undergo the sensation of the affect of this act corporeally. My intention with this part of the installation is to portray the act of reclaiming a sense of my own agency over my body by self-injuring, thereby moving from a dissociated objectified state to a more subjective experience of being in my body. Jane Kilby (2001:127), who writes about issues relating to trauma including self-injury with a focus on women's experiences, says "The cut-skin testimony of self-harm is a bloody means of seeking the affirmation of an existence denied by trauma. 'I cut, therefore I am.'"

I am asking the audience to sidestep their own subjective experience in order to feel the affect of my self-injury on their body, in that moment of engaging with the installation. One audience member said that as she entered the space and saw the light flashing across my hair, face and hands, she felt a sense of magic or mystery. This led her to make connections with fairy tales. The interesting aspect of this confrontation is that, when presented with sights and sounds that aren't immediately identifiable, the audience draws on more 'otherworldly' immaterial references from their own subjective experience in order to make sense of what they are encountering. While we can feel the affect of the encounter, as humans, we will always try to make meaning based on our own lived experience. It is my intention through my installation practice to attempt to transform the audience's sense of themselves and their being in the world.

In the third and final room, the audience encounters a video projection, showing a close up of the pulse on my neck, the surface of the skin reverberating from my heartbeat, the sound of which resonates in the space, the variable pink and brown tones of my skin shift as my breath moves the skin across the screen. The surface shows the fine hair on my skin glinting slightly in the light. Audience members described this as having a settling peaceful effect on them, where they

become aware of subtleties in their own bodies. In the words of one member of the audience, "I felt a kind of peace coming over me as I listened to the sounds of the heartbeat as I watched the pulse."

Fig. 7: Scratching Below the Surface, final room ©2017 Karen Abadie. Photo: Z. Markillie

Fig. 7

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I believe, as Kristeva suggests, that installation art offers audiences an access point to other worlds (Kristeva cited in Bann, 2010). She further suggests that it is a sacred space that offers real (multi-sensory) experience, beyond representation, a function of incarnation (Kristeva cited in Bann, 2010). I believe that, in providing a journey through this installation, from the affects of dissociation in the first room, through to the affect of the experienced body, I am offering audiences an opportunity to experience, beyond representation, beyond personality, beyond individual subjectivity, their own corporeal lived experience.

As human beings, subjectivity and affect are intrinsically linked. How we relate to both will determine how we relate to the world and art. Installation art in particular, because it is less about the object, rather it allows the audience to become the object, asks us to 'sidestep' our subjective selves in order to appreciate the affects of the work; as O'Sullivan (2001) says, to allow the matter in us to respond and resonate with the matter around us. Installation art asks us to get out of our own way and allow the pre-personal nature of affect to bring us into the present moment in order to experience a new sense of ourselves and our notion of the world. From this point, we are free to engage our subjectivity in order to make meaning, judgement and interpretation of what we are experiencing. This allows for the possibility that the subjectivity we are witnessing mirrors in some way our own subjective experience, and therefore has, through affect, allowed us to experience ourselves, or aspects of ourselves, that were previously unknown or as yet unrecognised.

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