APORIA

[*Ancient Greek: ἀπορία: "impasse, difficulty of passing, lack of resources, puzzlement") denotes in philosophy a philosophical puzzle or state of puzzlement and in rhetoric a rhetorically useful expression of doubt.*] Wikipedia.

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of

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Abstract

This exegesis is the result of my investigation into self-reference and paradox to reflect the difficulties I experience with dyslexia, in it I am describing and manifesting my own doubts and anxiety when confronted with the task of producing this text based document.

A circular discussion results, because to understand the problem one has to understand one's own thinking, this is the loop that the dyslexic is stuck within when confronted by the medium of written language. In it I question the notion of 'self' said to be socially constructed through language as a way to manifest 'affect' within video installation space.

What I have written about is the paradox of self-reference that exists within language that causes confusion between description of the world and the effect/affect of the infolding and out-folding of embodied experiences in space. When in the proximity of other bodies, objects, events, images and things.

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BACKGROUND

Since I was of school age I have always been anxious and struggled with the rigged structures of the academic environment because of my dyslexia. Specifically matching the symbolic text of written language to objects, concepts and events and arranging them into a meaningful structure that represents my thinking.

> *'The degree of heterography of a language is a factor in how difficult it is for person to learn to read that language, with highly heterographic orthographies being more difficult to learn than more homographic ones. Many people have espoused the point of view that the extreme heterographic nature of English is a disadvantage in several respects. These include, for example, Dr. Kiyoshi Makita writing in the July 1968 issue of the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, who attributes the rarity of dyslexia amongst Japanese children to the fact that Japanese is highly homographic language.' (1)*

My dyslexia has altered the way I think, perceive, construct and navigate meaning. In a world that is heavily reliant on written language for education, the dyslexic is immediately placed at a disadvantage from the moment they are exposed to a learning environment mediated by text.

> *'Studies have shown that dyslexia is genetic and can be passed down through families, but it is important to note that, although a genetic disorder, there is no specific locus in the brain for reading and writing. The human brain does have language centers (for spoken and gestural communication), but written language is a cultural artifact, and a very complex one requiring brain regions designed to recognize and name objects and to interpret written symbols as representations of language in rapid synchronization.' (2)*

As a dyslexic I experience anxiety and stress, feeling that I am lacking something. I feel the guilt of not reaching the performance expectations of my social peer's in every situation that

requires me to communicate with others. I feel stupid and alienated and to avoid this constant demoralising state of mind I developed strategies for coping.

I think in a visual language structuring and constructing meaning through the visual relationship of situations, objects and events, unlike thinking in a text based language which attaches abstract symbols to situations, objects and events.

It is because of my Dyslexia that I have always been interested in the ambiguities and paradoxes that exist within written language. As a result most of my research and work has focused on the philosophy and psychology of language trying to understand it and the role it plays in defining and describing the nature of being in the world.

Traditional philosophy can be understood through what Aristotle said when defining time; "the number of movements in respect of before and after", and what Martin Heidegger responded to when trying to deconstruct traditional thinking in western philosophy, which he described as the parasitic nature of the theoretical attitude privileging presence over absence, saying; "Entities are grasped in their being as, 'presence'; this means that they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time – the 'Present'". (3)

This exegesis focuses on the phenomenology of being in the world that places the technology of written language as the central mechanism for the construction of human identity. And the notion of a 'self' through 'other' by the situating of the 'self' within the idea of a presence and absence in time, i.e. a past, present, future tense proposed by Martin Heidegger.

You will see the connection to why I have discussed this point in relation to my own work and notions of presence related to technological immediacy that plague discussions about live and mediated performance and video installation later on within the discussion.

Initially I became intrigued with this area of investigation when I came across the quote; *"there is nothing outside the text",* by the post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida. Later he simplified this statement by saying; "*it means nothing more than, there is nothing outside of context".* This positions Derrida as a pragmatist or someone who believed in the subjectivity of the individual or a 'self' socially constructed by language. *(4)*

His approach to language, called deconstruction was also seen as an attempt to undermine and expose the hierarchies, oppositions and paradoxes in particular text located within the metaphysics of presence and which traditional western philosophy had focused its attention.

> *'The presence to which Heidegger refers is both a presence as in a "now" and also a presence as in an eternal, always present, as one might associate with god or the "eternal" laws of science. This hypostatized (underlying) belief in presence is undermined by novel phenomenological ideas — such that presence itself does not subsist, but comes about primordially through the action of our futural projection, our realization of finitude and the reception or rejection of the traditions of our time.' (5)*

I was intrigued by this idea that nothing existed outside of the text or context. This would imply that the idea of a 'self' only exists through the text or context that it was located within. For me this was perplexing, as it implies as a dyslexic I would always have difficulty being able to locate my 'self presence' because of my problems with language that had supposedly constructed my identity.

I wanted to challenge this notion of only being able to locate and represent myself through language. After I completed my BFA I started investigating theories to do with symbol grounding and the language of thought, ideas that were comparing the structure of the mind to the workings of computers.

I constructed text blocks within a computer and ran them through a number of programs and processes to explore ways to combine visual thinking with the symbolic thinking. Using text as an image to try and understand what the internal workings of a mind might look like that constructs a 'self' through the medium of language.
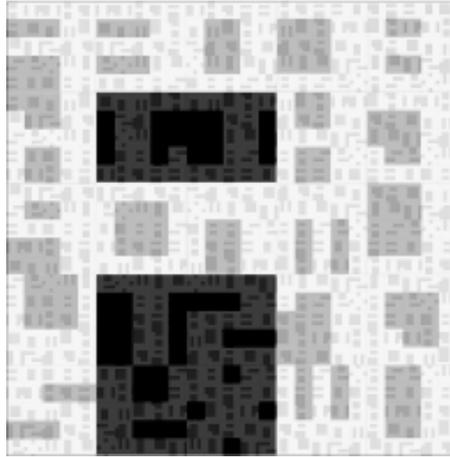
(a) Nigel Royal, *Alpha Codex, Text Block: A, (07/04/2005).*

The images below are some examples of these experiment that I conducted using ideas and processes that attempted to represent what it might look like for a mind to think like a computer and what happens when there is a problem or malfunction within this system. This was my way to explore my own doubts about the influence of language on notions of 'self' and problems I had with dyslexia.
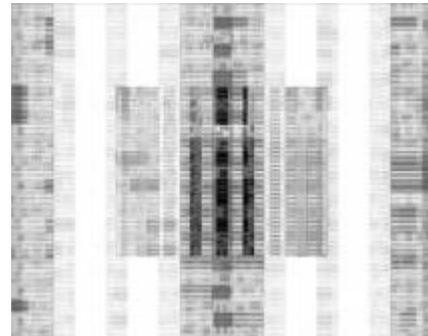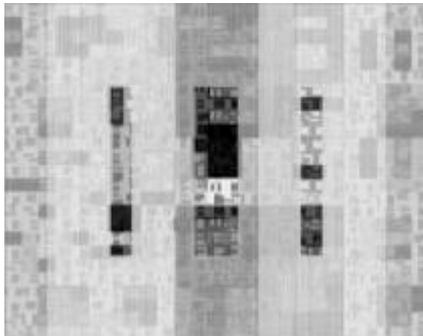
(b) Nigel Royal, *Binary State,* Loop Video, 12:50min, (29/04/2011).

I had been experimenting within this area for a number of years when I decided to re enter the academic institution. I was determined to overcome my 'disability', but as time went on it soon got the better of me, realising that my dyslexia had not gone away I decided to once again use my 'disability' as a platform for the content of my work.

This time I would interrogate the written word through its performative capabilities. Using video installation and performance I began to investigate utterance and gesture, the body in space, and the boundary between identity construction and language.

METHOD AND REASONING

This exegesis is the result of my studio based art practice where I have conducted research into language through video and installation space. I am exploring the actual physical and psychological space of the performer and audience searching for the 'self' in the space between the mediated and the 'real'.

I have been attempting to locate where exactly this sense of 'self' is and how the social institutions and the media that we communicate with and through influence the way in which we perceive and construct this notion of 'I' from the point of view of the dyslexic mind.

I have done this in an attempt to manifest within physical space, the 'affect' or experiences of my dyslexic mind when facing the difficulties of navigating the world through text based language.

It is an artist's investigating into the problems arising through self-referencing, a paradoxical problem that arises between describing and experiencing.

This exegesis does not give any answers or solve any problems it is an investigation and explanation of a process I have employed for the purpose of making art works.

These art works address my own issues when confronted by an academic world demanding performance through a medium that acts in opposition to the thought processes of my dyslexic mind.

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS

In my post graduate year I started making works that involved performative utterances after investigating Ludwig Wittgenstein's, *Language Games* and J.L Austin's, *Speech Act Theory*. Being part of the philosophy of language where sentences are not just passive in the description of a reality, but also change reality. In other words saying something causes a performance or '*performative act*' to happen like a command or a promise.

Artist Bruce Nauman is widely acknowledged as saying that Wittgenstein was an influence on his own work, confirming this Arthur C. Danto writes;

> *"A great deal of the work of Bruce Nauman consists in issuing commands,...it is perhaps helpful to consider those works as having at times the framework and logic of language games--which means, since the works are often directed at us, that we are meant to do something in response...designed as language games, they address us less as viewers than participants. To experience a Nauman is to interact with it in some way that goes beyond appreciating it as a work of art."* (6)

When Nauman left graduate school and was confronted with what to do as an artist in his studio he had a profound moment that would produce art about the process of making art and move the focus of art away from art as product. The profound question he asked himself; "if I was an artist and I was in my studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art".

This statement was to set the scene for nearly all of his future works where he used his body to explore the potentials of art and the role of the artist through the medium of film and video. He explored the psychological and behavioural states and codes, using the paradoxical problems that language posed for his material, questioning the role of the artist as a communicator and manipulator of visual symbols.

The more you investigate his work the more it can be seen in relation to Wittgenstein and J.L Austin. For me all of his most important works place the audience in the position of the performer questioning the socially constructed system of language. Creating a profound awareness of our human condition mediated by language.

Christine Hoffman in her essay about the work of Bruce Nauman for the Guggenheim Museum exhibition called *Theatres of Experience* and curated by Susan Cross discusses how Nauman disorients his audience in, *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning) 1992,* saying;

> *"Against the backdrop of the work's disorienting qualities, we come to recognise the power structures, processes, and undercurrents we have long internalised and been assimilated into. In our normal lives, we operate seamlessly within the prescriptions of these systems, among them everyday language, roles, habits, and practices. By contrast, in Nauman's art the observer is the central actor, but one without a role prescribed by society's structures. This opens up the possibility for genuine experience in those spaces in between – the interstitial space – through our physical and spiritual presence."* (7)
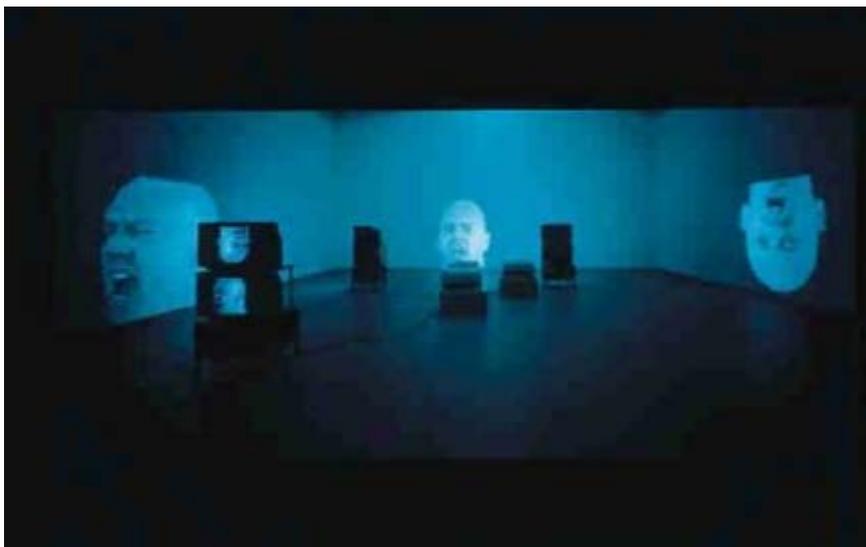
(c) Bruce Nauman*, Anthro-Socio,* Installation view*, (1992).*

This idea of a 'genuine experience' is what Heidegger and Derrida seem to have been refuting when they challenge the possibility of a 'pure presence' proposed by the traditional thinking in western philosophy, but to me it also seems to be what Nauman and other artists are trying to discover and interpret within their work.

YES/NO

Through a series of performance based videos installations I attempted to recreate the anxiety that I felt when confronted with reading. I tried to replicate this state of uncertainty and indecision by constructing a simple dialogue that involved confirmation and denial. A *Yes/No* situation in which the audience sat in between two monitors listening to two me's in an oppositional dialogue.

(d) Nigel Royal*, YES/NO, cognitive dissonance*, Loop video, (03/12/2012).

When what we believe ceases to be useful within the context of our present situation a dissonance is created that causes us to doubt our own thinking, challenging what we once believed to be true in our own mind.

New information is obtained and this information conflicts with the knowledge that we hold presently we are challenged to alter the structure of what we believe to allow us to operate in this new situation. Being challenged to 'change our mind's' and in so doing we start to change ourselves.

This is where we become uneasy with the world because change moves us into a situation where we are no longer comfortable with the person we once thought we were. Our identity is threatened as change moves us closer to the chaotic where we are no longer in control.

The situation above describes and moves us towards what the anthropologist *Victor Turner* called the liminal; a border zone where we are in transitory state of conflicting demands.

Turner's notion of liminality describes a passage with three points, entrance, departure and arrival. Departure creates confusion as it alienates and separates the real 'self' of Lacan's imaginary order from the reflected (narcissistic) socially constructed 'other' of Lacan's symbolic order.

The mind is confused and tries to build meaning on its previous experiences through a process of restructuring, old beliefs haunt new. Briefly there is a moment when we occupy "affect' space, it is outside of description and we experience through the body.

This is the moment my work attempts to grasp by placing the viewer between what they know and don't know.

Yes/No situates the audience in a loop between confirmation and denial. They experience the same dissonance that we have all experienced when our beliefs are conflicted or challenged by incoming perceptual experiences. There is indeterminacy between information and environmental factors. A universal experience that permeates every Human being placing us between choice and chance; it is the failure of our reasoning to obtain an answer in the debate between structure and agency that causes dissonance.

As we sit in between the two monitors the rhythm of the dialogue that takes over. We hear the sound rather than the meaning of the dialogue. Meaning disappears and we only experience the effect of something happening. We are present; we are affected and outside of language.

BIG BANG THEORY

In *Big Bang Theory* I recording myself front and side, blowing up balloons until they burst. During the recording I experienced a build up of anxiety as the balloon got bigger and bigger. Even though I knew the outcome, I still got anxious and grimiest every time a balloon actually burst.

(e) Nigel Royal, *BIG BANG THEORY, Frightful expectation, anticipation and anxiety, Loop video, (14/08/2013).*

Like yes/no I then played the two recordings on monitors facing each other, with a space between them for an audience to sit. The two me's simultaneously blew up balloons which would go in and out of sync causing the audience further anticipation and anxiety as they waited.

This experiment was designed to try and understand how expectation and uncertainty cause anxiety. And if the same experience I had when making the work translated into a similar reaction and experience when the audience sat in between the two monitors in the mediated version.

What I was exploring was a way to create anxiety without utterance or text by taking a starting point from outside of descriptive language that could create an affect response. A sensation using sound and visual cues to illicit some type of universal familiarity. I was looking for a reaction before the descriptive mind of the social 'self' took over.

This notion of the social 'self' is like a boat, where to keep afloat it still has to keep a certain amount of its structure intact. It is the point of conflict in between the old and the new, past and future creating a sense of uncertainty in the ever present now that makes us anxious.

ENDEMIC MIRROR - *The fragmented self*

(f) Nigel Royal*, ENDEMIC MIRROR - The fragmented self,* image from Installation walk through, (08/10/2012).

In the endemic mirror I projected body parts throughout the architecture of the art school building dispersing and fragmenting my personality through the stairwell. I wanted to see how far apart I could separate the elements that visually represent my personality to others, asking how far I could push this gap before meaning and my identity disappeared.

It was an attempt to separate the 'self' that others saw from the 'self' that 'I' projected back onto me, or to deconstruct the constructed idea of myself through fragmentation.

We are alienated from ourselves the moment we recognise the 'self' in the mirror as the 'other'. The 'other' is a constructed image projected back upon the 'self' through the way we think or believe others see us; the socially constructed 'self'.

This double that we experience through reflection is difficult to keep in our mind. For each time it appears in the mirror, the internal 'self' has already changed, so how we see ourselves has changed and this image although familiar seems to look different, strangely uncanny.

Video as an analogy of this 'self' 'other' relationship, it a problematic medium precisely because it functions at a level that exists below consciousness, where it works much like the

fluency of a dream. What Lacan called the 'real'; the pre symbolic stage where images are looked at and understood outside of descriptive language.

According to Jacques Lacan and his proposed theory of the 'imaginary order', 'apperception' is a turning point where 'oneself' becomes an object viewed from outside, the ability to look at our selves the way that other people see us. Initially Lacan applied the term 'mirror stage' to early infant child development but realised later that it represented a permanent structure of subjectivity, the paradigm of the 'Imaginary order'. (8)

In 1902 Charles Horton Cooley's proposed the psychological concept of 'Looking glass self', he said that we learn to view ourselves through the social perception of others, we gain identity, or self by learning to see ourselves as other see us, from an early age we continue to modify our identity, continuing through our whole life we change ourselves to conform to our social environment and the perception of others, he proposed that this processes does not stop unless all social interaction stops. (9)

Roslyn Kraus in her essay Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism proposed that video should not be thought of as a medium but as a psychological structure resembling the narcissistic state. (10)

My own investigations focus on the way that the moving image acts on the subconscious and strikes directly at our imagination, bypassing our literal interpretation. The moving image does not require any standardised form of literacy; we can experience uncertainty, ambivalence and indeterminacy when confronted by works of video art.

My interest lies within the psychological structure of the video medium and investigates ways of navigating between, the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. Questioning how and why the self is perceived, affected and presented between mind, context and the technological medium.

The situation of uncertainty that I have constructed within my work can be compared to the notion of linguistic or philosophical indeterminacy described below;

> *'The problem of indeterminacy arises when one observes the eventual circularity of virtually every possible definition. It is easy to find loops of definition in any dictionary, because this seems to be the only way that certain concepts, and generally very important ones such as that of existence, can be defined in the English language. A definition is a collection of other words, and in any finite dictionary if one continues to follow the trail of words in search of the precise meaning of any given term, one will inevitably encounter this linguistic indeterminacy'.* (11)

Yes/No and *Big Bang Theory* situates the audience between an eternal loop of confirmation and denial, expectation and uncertainty. They experience cognitive dissonance when their beliefs about the world are conflicted by incoming perceptual information that sits in opposition to their own social reality.

On a philosophical and psychological level this indeterminacy described above can be considered as a product of a paradoxical situation where reasoning based on a seemingly true assumption leads to a contradiction. The idea of self-reference creates this contradictory situation the Austrian-born American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut suggests that;

> *'For an individual to talk about, explain, understand or judge oneself is linguistically impossible, since it requires the self to understand its self. This is seen as philosophically invalid, being self-referential, or reification, also known as a circular argument. Thus, if actions arise so that the self attempts self-explanation, confusion may well occur within linguistic mental pathways and processes.'* (12)

Lacan proposed much like Derrida that our identity, the 'self' or 'I' is structured through language within a social context; we become a 'me' or object by the projection of how we think others see us so the self is always an alienated false construct leading us away from the 'real' self.

Paul Ekman did a series of experiments that showed how people have a private persona and a public persona. He observed when people are with others their reactions to stimuli's were completely different than when they experienced that stimuli's in a solitary situation, showing that we can hold two conflicting views in the same mind.

In our lives we do many things that are seemingly irrational or illogical. We take part in rituals that defy reasonable explanation and say things that are totally in opposition to what we think.

I have been listening to other people's beliefs and the meaning that they have transplanted onto my work. Each person had a different perspective or set of bias where their opinions originated from. I listened and took on what they said. Changing my mind and the direction of the work accordingly.

Am I to easily influenced by other's? Do I feel a need to project their opinions and beliefs onto my own work? Does gaining their acceptance confirmation the existence of my own 'self'?

At this point I decided to try and follow my own instincts and let others believe what they will. Although this once again might place me on the outside and set me up for failure I must be true to what I feel the work is about.

ENDEMIC MIRROR - *Othering*

When I first looked into my own eyes on a television monitor I did not expect to encounter an otherness that would separate me from my own idea or 'belief' of who I am or was. How had the camera and the monitor replaced me? I proceeded to film separate parts of my face, then my body and play them back to myself but this time placing in close proximity to each other.

What or who was I looking at? Was this just me in a previous tense or was I some how changing in front of my own eyes.
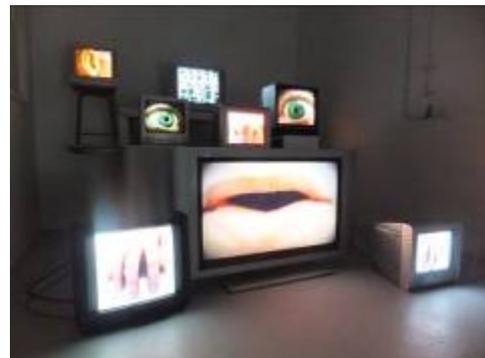
(g) Nigel Royal, *ENDEMIC MIRROR - Othering,* Video installation view, (*14/08/2013).*

When looking into a mirror one sees a reflection in real time and even when we look into a camera lens and simultaneously see ourselves on a monitor we see the present tense 'I'. But what are we looking at when we are viewing ourselves after the event? Who is the person we are seeing in this future moment and how different will they be as time passes; not just in what they look like but how they feel about this other?

What I believe now is different from what I knew and believed then. I am fragmented by time in both physically and in my understanding of who I am and who I was. If I could talk to me now from the past, would what I understand of who I was, be different from who I actually am now in the present tense?

Can a mediated object contain some form of 'real self' or can a 'self' only exist in the present tense happening now in time? Does that mean that who we are is always constructed upon beliefs of who we were?

The monitors fragment and reconfigure each part of the face and body allowing them to act independently. Eyes, ears, mouth, nose, hands and feet take on a life of there own but are part of the same whole that visually represent a personality trying to hold its own presence. Different moments sectioned of and framed into a singular moment waiting, waiting always waiting, but for what?

As this constructed entity stares out at us, it utters and sniffs, listens and waits. Are its fingers tapping out a message? Or, are they merely bored just passing time? We are captivated by this mediated presence that stares and gaze out upon us. It invites us to question our own motivations for looking, waiting and staring. We question what it is about ourselves that makes us keep looking.

Disjointed and disconnected from its body a fragmented face waits, sniffs, listens and looks for something outside of its electronic gaze. Caged and caught within its electronic box, it attempts to affect an audience through a universal image of its makers reflection.

We see ourselves in this mediated 'other' that moves its sensory organs separately, splitting its attention across multiple outputs. The fragmented mirror self of the information age, waits but with no prevail, we will not satisfy its attentive gaze but it will continually pay us attention, just as we do it.

During this process of experimentation I have been reading about the differences between magical thinking and scientific reason to try and gain insight into how exactly we have ended up in this paradoxical situation existing within the highly mediated environment of modern thought.

I had been looking at magical thinking vs. scientific thinking because when we feel uncertainty and anxiety about a situation we turn to irrational beliefs to relieve anxiety of the unknown. It is the position in between these two types of thinking that interests me, it is where the uncanny appears.

Through my research I have found that both belief systems fill the same gap; our need to find order within chaos when confronted by change and uncertainty. It seemed strange that they are completely at odds with each other.

In the present situation we want to see and understand things in the world as they really are, so we developed science. But at the same time we want to keep mysteries alive that have their origins firmly rooted in magical thinking. This can be seen as the cause of a cognitive dissonance, as science has always been trying to disassociate itself from its origins; Eugene Subbotsky confirms this by saying:

> *"Scientists have explained much of the physical world and produced effects that would be viewed as magical a few centuries ago (transmitting auditory and visual messages remotely; flying in the air and space). They persuaded most of us that believing in magic contradicts both everyday experience and the fundamental laws of nature. In the modern civilized world magical thinking is ousted from nature and finds its last refuge in art, religion and imagination. Yet traces remain, in the everyday lives of both children and adults, with some surprising and important implications."* (13)

In a discussion about the work of video artist Tony Oursler by Demetrio Paparoni coming from a slightly different direction confirms this by stating:

> *"After all, there is no thought that does not spring from a mythical horizon. In our own personal life, we see rationality emerge from the mythical context of childhood, or rather from childlike wonder. Thus reason longs for its origins and organizes language to counteract their seductive appeal."* (14)

This contradiction in modern thinking at the irrational crossroads of magic and science is the basis of Tony Oursler practise. He investigates belief systems and psychosis caused by irrational thinking, magical thinking out of step with contemporary ideologies. Approaching

belief systems from a ambivalent position because it is terrifying and fascinating simultaneously depending on ones relative position.

He states in an interview with Gianni Mercurio that;

"I'm fascinated by what is accepted and what is not accepted. There is a connection between being open to other belief systems and to the creative process." (15)

(h) Tony Oursler, Cyc, (2004).

In my work the previous history of images of past work haunt the present work, acting like a reflected, reflexive memory. A ghost image projected back into memory, building on a foundation of previous belief, still floating around inside its own body.

Objects become animated through affect, gaining energy through a relationship existing in a slippage between empathy and repulsion. A simultaneous uncanny other emerges in the recognition of our own humanness.

Dan Graham's work in the 1970's focused on topical issues of performance art, the human body, and holistic perceptions surrounding them. He prioritized the body as the vehicle for experience and knowledge. His interest in bodies of the performer and audience as a communication system can be seen in parallel with Merleau-Ponty's idea that it is the physical involvement of the subject in a situation that allows for the possibility of perception and knowledge.

(i) Dan Graham, *Performer/Audience/Mirror*, (1975).

In Performer/Audience/Mirror 1975 Dan Graham stands in front of a mirror facing an audience. He describes what his body is doing while the audience sits on the floor looking at the reflection of themselves and the back of the performer while watching themselves watching the performer and themselves. He explains very minute details of how his body is performing. At one point he moves out of the reflection of the mirror leaving the audience to view only them selves in the mirror or watch Graham move into the corner then back into the reflection. He describes what the audience are doing and how they act, he describes every detail with words, describing actions, colours, people and himself, all this while being videoed.

(j) Dan Graham, *Past Continuous Present(s)*, (1974).

Graham questions and pushes the boundary between subject and object, self as many and the myth of the autonomous subject.

In the twenty first century the contemporary experience is one of accelerated and multiple perspectives. My work also investigates how the "self" is placed in a position of uncertainty and doubt when confronted with this multiplicity.

I propose that we are now experiencing what I will call "the paradoxical position", because to choose from an infinite number of perspectives makes us anxious and stressed. It is at this point that we become irrational, we seek alternative ways of constructing meaning to protect us from the debilitating outcomes of stress and anxiety.

PRELIMINARY VIDEO INSTALLATION WORK

PARADOXICAL POSITION & MUST PERFORM

Within my video instillation practice I reconfigure temporal mental concepts, physically manifesting them into visual representation through material objects and environments, trying to make the intangible tangible. The challenge has been to try and bypass the constructs of language and aim directly at 'affect'; a state of emotional intensity existing before language describes it as feeling.

I wanted to physically testing how mental concepts can be constructed and experienced as 'affect' manifesting physicality within the space and the body. I initially constructed a series of experimental instillations that placed the audience into a position where they were being asked to participate in a performance that made them question who it was that they were performing and why or what they were performing for.

> *'An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. Of the three central terms in this essay – feeling, emotion, and affect – affect is the most abstract because affect cannot be fully realised in language, and because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness (Massumi, Parables). Affect is the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience. The body has a grammar of its own that cannot be fully captured in language because it "doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts…" (Massumi, Parables 30).* (16)

Between Video and performance art there has been an ongoing ontological debate between live and mediated presence, in the article entitled *What is Performance Art,* Irish performance artist and writer Amanda Coogans' discusses this debate by contrasting the opinions of two performance art theorists Peggy Phelan and Amelia Jones.

Phelan who is quoted as saying;

> '*Performance's only life is in the present'* and argues for a 'manically charged' present experienced through the close proximity of the performer and audiences body's. She defines performance art as something that happens only as a 'live' event. (17)

Jones on the other hand argues for the validity of the 'mediated document' being equally as valid as 'live performance' due to the possibility of the viewer/audience being able to consider the work outside the 'manically charged' present of live performance.

Recently Philip Auslander offers a third perspective, in a presentation titled, *Ontology Vs History: Making Distinctions Between The Live and the Mediatised,* he dismisses this distinction between Phelan and Jones argument by stating:

> '*It is clear that the impulse to set live and mediatised forms in a relation of opposition is ideological in nature. Perhaps making a virtue of necessity, some theorists argue that live performance's existence on the margins of the economy of repetition making it an oppositional discourse.'* (18)

Auslander argues that the two categories rely on each other for their existence, as there was no historical distinction or definition of performance as 'live' before the ability to record and reproduce its content appeared and states once more:

> '*My argument is that the very concept of live performance presupposes that of reproduction that the live can exist only within an economy of reproduction.'* (18)

In Philip Auslander's book, *Liveness – performance in a mediatised culture*, he argues that the live, or liveness, as a human experience is merely a construct of human consciousness that has changed over time according to technological advancements. Developing his rhetorical argument through definitions of liveness within human language, he states that before we had the ability to record and replay performance we did not use the word 'live' to describe human performance and it's actual experience. In other words performance was performance as it was only live. (19)

He proceeds to give examples of how in the present moment in time we are no longer concerned about the actual live, lived presence of the performer. As we have reached a point where the mental constructs of the live experience are so manipulated by mass media that it has altered our perceptions of how we experience and thus, experiencing a mediatised performance has now become no different from a live performance.

His argument like Heidegger and Derrida before him follows the premise that human language is the foundation on which we understand and describe the world; the mind, understanding or consciousness works like a computer. An information processing system, a symbolic symbol manipulator and generator with only descriptions of emotions but no 'affect' response.

Irish artist Willie Doherty challenges Auslander's idea of human consciousness by confronting us with mediated images that challenge our fragile beliefs about reality and illusion, experience and representation. Challenging our thinking about identity and how we construct opinions and beliefs through media. His work is a reminder that our language and technology are not to be trusted to tell the truth.

(k) Willie Doherty, *Non-Specific Threat*, (2004).

Working against the post-modern ideal of Baudrillard's simulacrum and the hyper real, Doherty reminds us that not all our experiences can be completely mediated. He attempts to reveal in his work that there is a minute bit of experience that technological media cannot reproduce, the actual human experience of the self from within the event. (19)

The work of Doherty takes multiple perspectives of the same situation trying to construct a closer depiction of the actual live, lived situation and attempts to dispute and interrogate the perceived post-modern fallacy that all experience is completely mediated.

He tries to discover the minute particle of evidence that mediation cannot replicate, the experience we have when actually positioned within the actual event itself. But how can the unmediated exist without being articulated through the human who's idea of 'self' is a socially constructed entity that relies on language, here is the paradox between self and language.

In my video installations I have tried to place the audience within a similar position that Doherty investigates by positioning them between the projected mediated live images of their own bodily presence, but at the same time experiencing their own body through performing live. This happens within the physical space and simultaneously within the mediated space of the installation.

From the very outset of this MFA my aim has been to construct mechanisms and apparatuses that create a sense of aporia or doubt about the way meaning is constructed and mediated through language and how this effects the notion of 'self'.

But how does one describe this deconstruction of meaning when 'describing' automatically implicates language as a way to destabilise the structuring mechanism?

> *Julia Kristeva developed the idea of the abject as that which is rejected by/disturbs social reason - the communal consensus that underpins a social order. The "abject" exists accordingly somewhere between the concept of an object and the concept of the subject, representing taboo elements of the self barely separated off in a liminal space.* (21)

This liminal space infers a notion of in-betweeness where language becomes muddled and confused because we are no longer anchored to the socially constructed environment, we become abject.

Within the installation space of my work, *Paradoxical Position and Must Perform,* we find ourselves wandering through a gap in descriptive meaning. Our sense of 'self' in the present tense disappears into a mediated past tense on screen. We look for signs to guide us back out into to a place that we can recognise and understand. A place where we can perform and be part of a performance that is socially constructed.

Within the installation we get a passing glimpse of what Willie Doherty is trying to locate outside of the mediated, but we cannot exist in this liminal state for long. The 'real' thrusts us back out into the symbolic reality, we then try to describe our experience through language but fail.

The social institution acknowledges our right of passage back into the 'reality' world constructed by language. The 'self' in a present tense is only reinforced by this notion of an 'I' as subject constructed by a point of view of the socially reflected otherness, or 'Me' as a socially constructed object in the ever present now.

Video installation as an artistic practice investigates relations with what *Margret Morse* describes in her essay *Video Installation Art* as the plane of presentation, she offers an explanation of this stating;

> *Instead of offering simplicity, the presentational arts are hybrid and complex. For instance, even though the plane of expression of the presentational arts is essentially the present, it is possible to explore physically more than one tense-reference to the past and future and can coexist with the present, provided that all are figured and grounded in the experience of the here and now.* (22)

The work I have constructed plays on this tense-reference to destabilise and defamiliarise the performer/audiences ability to distinguish and locate there own 'self' as 'I', the subjective knower, and the self as 'me' the object that is known. Placing them into the psychological state of uncertainty, they become anxious about how they are meant to be performing. They question what is real and what is constructed, placing them into a state of cognitive dissonance.

Morse proceeds to describe the two types of video installation that are differentiated by tense. Explaining firstly that closed-circuit video operates through "presence" where a camera transmits a live feed to a monitor, of the audience in a charged position within the installation space, positioning them between two and three dimensions, explaining that;

> *"Closed-circuit installation explores the fit between images and the built environment and the process of mediating identity and power."* (23)

Paradoxical Position treats the moving image as a real time surveillance device where the audience become part of a 'mese-en-scene' through what is known as the droste effect or video feedback creating an image within an image. I have employed this technique to displace and interrogate notions of identity, self and otherness.

The performer/audience are immersed in a scene where they watch there own image performing virtually while experiencing themselves within there own physical body performing an exercise (repetitive bouncing). Thus confirming their own physical location within the set, a scene within a scene, they are within the *Paradoxical Position*.

The *Paradoxical Position* operates in a similar manner to a film set or a theater scene. The audience are no longer just spectators but become performers who are able to both watch and perform simultaneously. Their own projected 'self' becomes the model on which they fashion the 'self'. This places them in between two mediated selves where they become uncertain and anxious about who they are or where the 'self' is actually positioned, disorientating them. Morse then proposes;

> *"The recorded-video art installation, can be compared to the spectator wandering about on stage, in a bodily experience of conceptual propositions and imaginary worlds of memory and anticipation. A conceptual world is made manifest as literal objects and images set in physical relation to each other.* (24)

The work, *Must Perform* is a self-referencing self-portrait revealing my own conflicting anxieties and fears of failure that I have experience when confronted with the academic environment that demands written proof of my abilities. Hence this document and the art work are connected and we have come full circle through the literary technique of 'mise em abyme' or a story within a story and mise-en-scene' an image within an image.

<u>*On The Spot* . Initial investigations combining . *Paradoxical Position & Must Perform*</u>

(l) Nigel Royal, *On The Spot 1, (10/05/2013).*

In this preliminary investigation *On The Spot 1,* combining *Paradoxical Position & Must Perform,* I was trying to understand how these two works operated together within an enclosed and restrictive space. In my performance work *Must Perform* I recorded myself jumping on re-bounder trampoline whilst reciting performative commands;

> *I can perform, I must perform, I will perform…*
>
> *I can't perform, I mustn't perform, I will not perform…*
>
> *I could perform, I might perform, I may perform…*

(See Appendix (A) for script)

Then like the work *Yes/No* playing the video recording back between two monitors, placing the audience in between. A paradoxical position I attempted to explore in *On The Spot* tests. Positioning the physicality of the body in between a real live 'self' and a mediated 'self'. I was trying to understand how and what was causing the dissonance and anxiety when confronted by a double or mirror self.

I realised that the restrictions I had placed on them through the way the installation was configured made them react in ways that reflected how I felt when confronted by a society that demands that we perform in a certain way with no allowances for difference, grading us on written academic skill's, social integration and economic success.

Some of the reactions when participants talked about their feelings towards the work, using words like restricted, confined, scared and anxious echoing my own experiences when asked to perform myself, so I proceeded down this path by trying out a number of different configurations of the space.

This also lead to the following line of questioning; If I am inside my body then where am I located? In my brain? If I am, then am I the sum of all the experiences that my body has experienced? Is it that experience that defines me, or my self?

For "I" to perform "myself" presumes that "I" can locate "myself". Am "I" my self the body that "myself" sees, the "I" in the mirror? This type of self-referencing is a recursive paradox.

(m) Nigel Royal, *On The Spot* 2, (15/05/2013).

(n) Nigel Royal, *On The Spot* 3, (20/06/2013).

When you first encounter the work *On The Spot 2* you see a man appearing and disappearing in and out of frame from the bottom of a video monitor, which is then re-projected onto the opposing wall. He is uttering a dialogue that is questioning, commanding and asserting the possibility of performing himself.

By placing the audience into the position of the performer within a mediated video installation where they feel like they must perform when prompted by the mediated performer seems to arouse a sense of anxiety about there own choice and ability's.

(o) Nigel Royal, *On The Spot* 4, (18/07/2013).

Through all these tests pieces I experimented with camera angles, camera placement, projector positioning and the overall configuration of the space for the enhancement of the experiential properties that I have discussed through this exegesis.

FINAL INSTALLATION

PARADOXICAL POSITION--MUST PERFORM

These images represent the set up and testing of the final intallation *Paradoxical Position and Must Perform*, acting as evidence of the technical layout, operation and function of the equipment used within the spaces.

PARADOXICAL POSITION / TECHNICAL RIGGING AND FUNCTION

(p) Nigel Royal, *Paradoxical Position, 1, a.b.c.* (2014).

The previous sections in this exergesis discuss the preliminary work that led up to *Paradoxical Position and Must Perform,* titled; **Preliminary Investigations / Preliminary Video Installation Work / On The Spot, preliminary investigations combining, Paradoxical Position & Must Perform**. They acted as an exploration for the way in which I want the work to be understood and experienced.

The final work includes the use of radio frequency transmiters working between cameras, projectors, monitors and DVD players which interfere with each others signal transmition. Designed to further create a sense of confusion and doubt within the mind of the performer/audience.
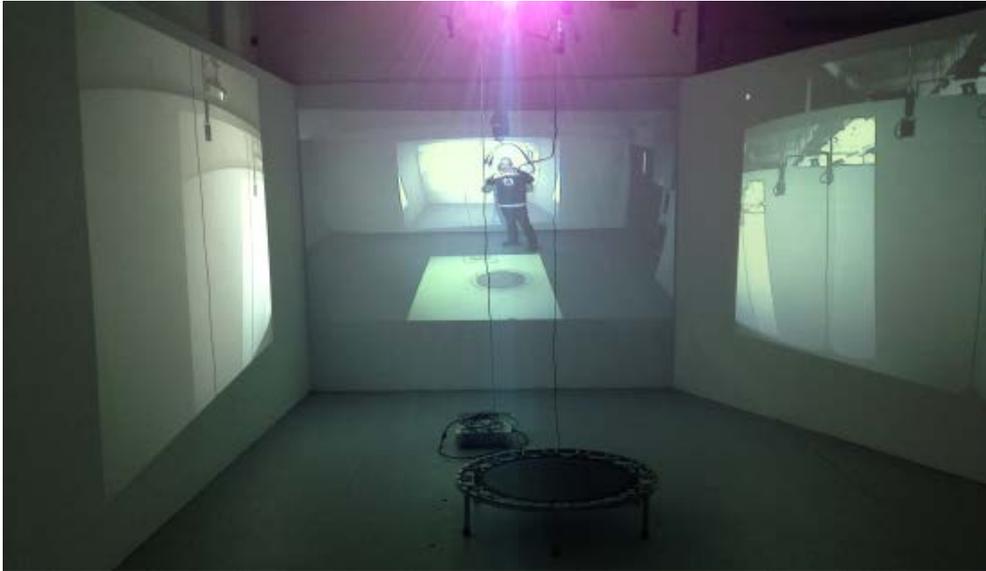

(q) Nigel Royal, *Paradoxical Position, 2.* (2014)

Before you enter the instillation you hear the sound of clapping, applause and voices demanding and denying performance. You wonder if it is directed at you? Asking yourself, "should I perform"?

(r) Nigel Royal, *Paradoxical Position, 3.* (2014)

When you enter the instillation you notice your own image mirrored and flipped to your right when you are facing the end wall, you become disorientated as to your own position. You see a re-bounder trampoline in the middle of the room lit by a spot light and you also notice a projection of the trampoline on the plinth in front of you. You ask yourself, "Am I meant to perform, what does this mean"?
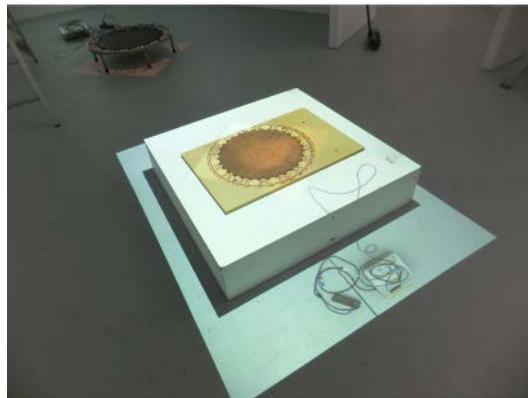

(s) Nigel Royal, *Paradoxical Position, 4.* (2014)

If your answer is yes and you decide to take a chance and participate you move to enter the spotlight and get onto the trampoline. You start to perform by bouncing. Next you notice that you can see the back of your head, while simultaneously seeing your face between oscillations of the bounce. You experience an uncanny moment, as this is a part of yourself you know but rarely experience.

You also notice that opposite sides of your face can be viewed as you bounce but then it strikes you that these two positions have been reversed. Turning round as you bounce you start to feel the physical affect on your body. You then notice that the projection on the plinth on the floor is showing your image from above.
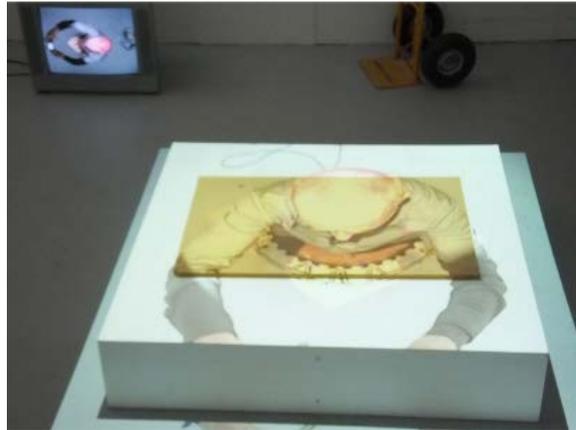
(t) Nigel Royal, *Paradoxical Position, 5.* (2014)

If you are still able to bounce you start to feel an uneasy sensation as your mind starts to question you position and the direction that you are facing. Then you notice that the monitors in the corner are broadcasting your image as well but there is also someone else bouncing. This makes you wonder if there is another room or another performer. The images on the monitor go in and out of sync, there are multiple situations being overlaid on top of each other.
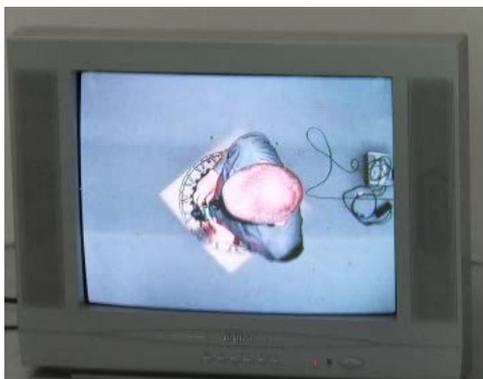
(u) Nigel Royal, *Paradoxical Position, 6.* (2014)

By now you have probably stopped bouncing and are walking round the room trying to work out which projection comes from where. Confusion and doubt about where you are has made it difficult to stay in the space. You might leave the room but as you do, you notice that your

physical presence seems to be effecting the images on the monitors and you feel that there might be something about your physicality that you cannot see.

Your understanding of the world might have changed after you leave this artificially constructed environment, this liminal zone. You might go looking for the other room and the performer that you saw bouncing on the monitors.

MUST PERFORM

(v) Nigel Royal, *Must Perform , 1.* (2014)

You have found it and enter. It is filled with monitors with images of a man bouncing and chanting out a dialogue demanding and denying performance. But, whose performance, his or yours? You also hear and see hands clapping and ask, "are they applauding for the man's performance, or mine?
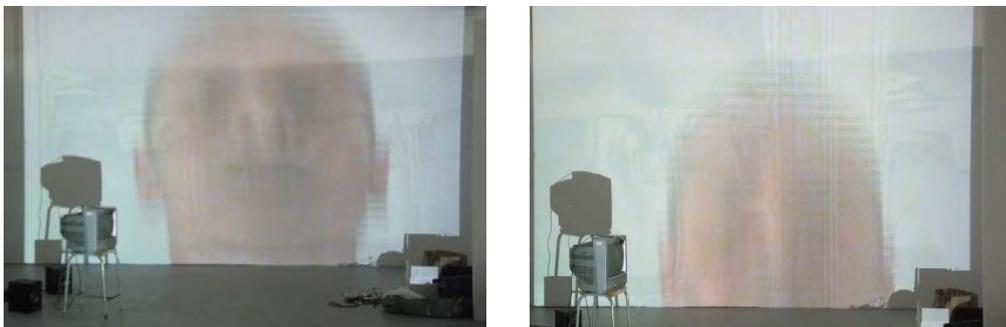
(w) Nigel Royal, *Must Perform , 2.* (2014)

These questions lead to circular arguments within your own mind when you try to answer them by locating your own position. You have entered aporia; a state of puzzlement, self doubt arising from the paradox of self-referencing, uncertainty and indeterminacy. Your mind is in a loop stuck in feedback.

By constructing psychological models within performative video installation I have been attempting to understand my own differculties in strcuturing the workd through a dyslexic mind. Although generally I am not fully aware of what I'm trying to understand or do at the time I allow my intuition to guide me, relying on the serendipity and synchronicity to intervene when necessary.

SUMMARY

I set out on this project with the intention of gaining some insight into my own fractured dyslexic thought processes and to try and find out if there is such a thing as a subjective 'self' or 'I' outside of the constructs of language.

Questioning if there is something more than an identity or a 'self' constructed through a series of social and institutionalised environments, labelling and classifying me as a dysfunctional or incapable because I am not able to complete the criteria set before me within these environments.

Knowing full well that this was an absurd and impossible task and that it was bound to fail, this seemed like a good place to start. As much like Sisyphus, pushing the rock up hill tends to be the only real way of gaining insight into who we really are. Confronting us with a sense of our own lack or inability to stand up to the performance demands put upon us by ourselves through mirroring others expectations.

All my work is centred a round an ongoing test and re-test process constantly feeding back and re-referencing itself. It is recursive.

The preliminary outcomes can be seen as individual art pieces in themselves and all interrogate the paradoxical existing within human language. They all approach similar problem through different mediums and perspectives, but they are always in the process of being re-configured and re-arranged to confuse interpretation and meaning. Revealing the constantly changing position between mind and its description of the real.

This is not something that sits well in an environment that demands reference and re-reference to fix meaning for placement within an index or reference catalogue for calculation and classification. Quantifiable information needs to have fixed meaning in a known system.

 My work is Self-referencing and can be seen as a device for the exploration of the paradoxical and the absurd, things that make us keep looking…

APORIA

What did this mean… it had been weeks since they had last seen any sign or indication from their external monitoring system, wandering round in circles seemed to be the only useful activity to stop them from loosing the last remaining pieces of the puzzle. Only their faith or fear of death forced them to keep pushing on.

All the energy of reality impinged upon their senses, weighing their bodies down, etching away at their existence, but with no actual quantifiable results. Everything that once seemed real no longer made sense, no sense, non-sense, was this offence, or defence? Even the shadows seemed to disappear when attempts were made to communicate, and only a pin dropping had more meaning to them than any other event in history.

Alone and isolated, nothing, no thing passed the boundary. Their isolation was complete and even the threshold at the edge of their own intentionality was filled with a fuzzy white haze. Direction disappeared, with no orientation. How could they know which movement would be successful, was this a journey of self-preservation?

If being lost was purgatory then they had even passed that point, how much strength was needed to pass through this inability to reason, this hell that tugged at the very idea of being.

How could this be? Where could this be? Questioning and questioning over and over again, a loop in feedback, or feedback in a loop, noise, static then silence. But if you listen closer that empty void disappears as silence can not exist within the matter of a functioning living body, silence boomed and pounded out an unintelligible message.

Every meaning that had been piled on top of its own back had disappeared in this place of enforced segregation, it was a rough ride through the maze of logical conclusion, brute facts and never ending rebuttal, empty and bare we lay there almost split in two.

*Reluctant to let go, only the mind could hold the narrow tether in this empty and spaceless nothing, the body functioned as an action reaction, no, nothing had made any sense, until now, in this nothingness, a sign, **intentionally blank ... keep looking,** so we did…*

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SCRIPT FOR PERFORMANCE

MUST PERFORM

Sound of applause between sentences

Hands clapping

Text running across screen

Utterance of text

PERFORM, PERFORMS, PERFORMANCE, PERFORMANCES, PERFORMING

I perform myself

I can perform, I must perform, I will perform…

I can't perform, I mustn't perform, I will not perform…

I could perform, I might perform, I may perform…

You perform yourself

you can perform, you must perform, you will perform…

you can't perform, you mustn't perform, you will not perform…

you could perform, you might perform, you may perform…

We perform ourselves

we can perform, we must perform, we will perform…

we can't perform, we mustn't perform, we will not perform…

we could perform, we might perform, we may perform…

They perform themselves

they can perform, they must perform, they will perform…

they can't perform, they mustn't perform, they will not perform…

they could perform, they might perform, they may perform…

He performs himself

he can perform, he must perform, he will perform…

he can't perform, he mustn't perform, he will not perform…

he could perform, he might perform, he may perform…

She performs herself

she can perform, she must perform, she will perform…

she can't perform, she mustn't perform, she will not perform…

she could perform, she might perform, she may perform…

Who performs them selves

who can perform, who must perform, who will perform…

who can't perform, who mustn't perform, who will not perform…

who could perform, who might perform, who may perform…

It performs

It can perform, it must perform, it will perform…

it can't perform, it mustn't perform, it will not perform…

it could perform, it might perform, it may perform…

Who is a performer

I am a performer, you are a performer, We are performers…

I am not a performer, you are not a performer, we are not performers…

I could be a performer,

He is a performer, She is a performer, They are performers…

Who is a performing

I am performing, You are a performing, We are performing…

They are performing

He is performing

She is performing

Who is performing

I am a performer

You are a performer

We are performers

They are performers

He is a performer

She is a performer

Who is a performer