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THE INTERIOR CINEMATIC

BEAUTIES AND HORRORS FROM THE STRANGE LOOP OF SELF

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

FRANCES BENSON
As always, profound love and gratitude to my parents Keith and Cathie and my brother Adrian - the points on my compass, always there, always themselves, but always available should I need help to navigate through times rough, smooth or strangely circular in nature.
ABSTRACT

When we are buffeted by extreme external or internal forces, the self may splinter and spiral in a psychological maze of disengagement and lost sovereignty. This trans-disciplinary design project responds – operating between fashion, performance and film – and acts out Elaine Scarry’s contention that pain can be constructively re-made.

Functioning as a metaphorical problem-solving space where the textures of inner experience are explored, this project employs fragmented narrative and theatrical re-fashioning of the environment and body to attain greater social relevance. It asks how can we reconnect with the ‘sovereign self’ when our constitutional confidence has been eroded and how do we re-engage with the outside world once we have become psychologically estranged from it?

The Interior Cinematic utilises cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter’s formulation of the self as a ‘strange loop’, and Louis A. Sass’ explanation of the dissociative and recursive features of schizophrenia as a point of poetic departure for understanding the damaged and dissociated self.

The lost self may seem like an end - a horrific freefall out of normal life into madness and estrangement. But it is also a beginning; the pinnacle of sensory ascendancy - a beautiful, lateral, life affirming state. Through The Interior Cinematic I construct an aesthetics of reengagement: an affective pathway between these contradictory and overlapping existential poles, contending that the lost self can, in part, be recovered through a rediscovery of sensation. This work is informed by Julia Kristeva’s assertion that alienation is the kernel for empathetic re-engagement with others, as well as by Arthur Frank’s theory of narrative as a strategy to reconnect with the damaged self.
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