

A Thesis Presented to
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“On” and “Through”

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In search of authenticity, I have begun to question the different aspects that make up life. Perhaps life is merely an array of experiences felt through time. The concepts of experience and time are both universal and elusive. Can an elusive idea be authentic or real? One thing we can say for certain is that we are bodies moving through space, and from birth to death we undergo experience. We experience the present, shaped by our perceptions of the past and future. In order to resolve my questioning of authenticity I will discuss the future, present, past, and our bodies in these time frames. In my work, I strive to create a feeling not only of bodily presence, but also of the present. By this, I simply mean to create a moment in which viewers become wholly aware of themselves in the present, in the now. The moment in which bodily awareness exists brings together the authenticity of the present with the authenticity of the physical, the body. The quest to define, explain, and create this moment has become my thesis project.

I started my quest by looking inward. Through this examination, I began to question the concept of authenticity. “In the person-centered conception, authenticity is a tripartite construct [as] defined by Barrett-Lennard” (Wood 386). However, I am only interested in the first level, “a person’s primary experience [this is... the] actual experience (the *true self*, including actual physiological states, emotions, and schematic beliefs...)” (Wood 386). This definition explains that authenticity implies genuine emotions and thoughts; and through this psychological definition I define my work. Authenticity cannot be disputed. For example, whether an antique is authentic can be questioned, but the truth, whether known or not, cannot be disputed. Furthermore, all things that are authentic are real; however, the reverse is not true. Actions, such as a smile, can be real but not authentic. The term real indicates physicality or an actuality. Beyond the physical, a lie can be real but not authentic. Authenticity implies genuineness. This concept of authenticity inspired my work.

My work is large scale installations, yet minimal in form. Although inspired and informed by surrealism, my pieces are not Surrealist, per se. From surrealism, I found a way to explore the body and cognitive thoughts. Surrealism led me to question and deconstruct convention. Historically, Surrealism was a literary movement that went against literary conventions by breaking down grammar and sentence structure. I, however, am deconstructing and questioning time and authenticity. When I first starting thinking about authenticity I was questioning time and thoughts. My first assertion is that we are born with our bodies and it is life that shapes our mind and who we are. Through time we explore; through time we live. We create who we are by who we think we are, what we think the world around us means, and who we think we should be. All of these are constructed. Which poses the question, what is authentic? Our thoughts are present and unquestionably occur. In order to read this paper thoughts pass through the mind, consequently thoughts must be real. In addition, our bodies are obviously real due to the body's physicality. However, real does not imply authenticity. In order to discuss this idea further, we must first dissect thought into three categories: past, present, and future. These periods of time will bring up some issues surrounding my exploration of thoughts –specifically thoughts being real, the authenticity of thoughts, and thoughts in time.

We can only think within time. Consequently, we can analyze thoughts we have had in the past, that we are currently having, and future thoughts. Let's examine the future case first. One reason the authenticity of our future thoughts is in question is because events cannot truly be predicted thus, neither can our thoughts. The future is never the present and therefore unknown. We cannot rely on having a certain thought at any point in the future.

Now let's consider the past. Memory distorts and twists what we think and how events are interpreted. I will explain this using an example. Suppose that yesterday morning the

weather was perfect and the day seemed like it would be a good day. However, in the early afternoon news was received that there was an accident. This one act can shift all of the previously conceived thoughts of the day. Moreover, that day including the morning, can be perceived or remembered as bad no matter how authentic that is to the actual feelings the person had that morning. This distortion is from memory and emotions acting on our perceptions of what our thoughts were; thus, shifting ideas and blocking a full and complete remembrance of our mental state. Our mind filters the past; the mind creates a blurred and abbreviated view of our past selves. The present version of past thoughts have been constructed in order to be rethought in the present. Therefore, the recollection of a past thoughts is real but not authentic to the original thought.

Only the instant we are experiencing can, with certainty, be pure and unaffected by memory. Our mind can only function in the present; our thoughts are only undistorted by the past and nonbiased by the future when they are thought. Even false thoughts, thoughts based on misinformation, are genuine and true to the integrity of a thought. Thoughts are authentic to their nature only in the present when they appear from inside the mind. Due to this, present thoughts and the present body are the only aspects of reality we can say exist and are authentic. We can assert this about the body following the same logic used to describe thought. Our bodies, similar to our thoughts, show evidence of past acts. However, cuts turn to scars and continue to change. A cut that turns to a scar is real, but only the fresh cut is authentic to the cause of the injury and a scab authentic to a healing cut. Hence, the body is authentic to the present. The ideology surrounding authenticity relies on the present. The present, the idea of both the body and thought being authentic in the present, is the moment in which I explore in my work.

Through my work I am exploring my feelings surrounding the concept of the present, alluding to its peculiarities with associations to past events and the perpetual future. I believe through addressing the present, an intensified awareness of reality, specifically in our bodies and thoughts, will be created.

As part of this exploration, I created two pieces. *Through* is a video projection and large-scale installation, and *On* is a floor sculpture. Within the work *Through*, the video is projected onto three 158 by 87 inch hanging sheets of fabric. In total, I used forty yards of 90-inch bolts of premium muslin. The sheets of fabric are hung facing the viewer in layers (Figure 1). Cut into the first fabric piece are two archways, the second fabric contains one archway, and the third has no cutouts. This removal of fabric allows for portions of the projection to fall through the empty spaces and catch on the next layer.

The archways also function as passageways. In considering the passageways, the viewer can choose whether or not to engage or interact with the piece. This echoes two types of reality, 'current state' and 'constructed reality'. The 'current state' refers to the physical world the viewer occupies and the video projection references the 'constructed reality'. The 'current state' is the present, the now, the viewer. Whereas the 'constructed reality' reflects the full scope of time; thus, referencing the projection. The video is made in the past, played in the present, and will continue in the future. The projection, or constructed reality, is not authentic; the artist must create and compose, and thus limit the constructed reality. When the viewer enters *Through* they are entering a space which houses both a current state and constructed reality. This creates a contrast and comparison between the two states. Existing within these opposing realities, the viewers can engage in exploring their current states. Metaphorically, the passageways in the sheets reflect the viewer's option: remain on the outside, or enter. The viewer can opt in and

actively engage in viewing the piece; consequently, the viewer can begin to explore a more hyper-realized-reality. Through interacting with the piece, the viewer engages in space, thus automatically creating an awareness of oneself. Stated in other terms, “[t]he body is ‘absent’ only because it is perpetually outside itself, caught up in a multitude of involvements with other people, with nature, with a sacred domain” (Leder 5). This all relies on the viewer’s decision to engage. Engagement does not necessarily mean physical movement, just a willingness, or awareness of the work. By questioning whether to enter, the installation creates notions about the body and the present through the action of thought. Creating bodily awareness focuses thought on the present and thus the current state. This awareness of self, in the present, and the overlay of real life inside a constructed reality (video) allows for thoughts about the present and the body in space. Alternatively, the viewer can opt out and remain in what is the state of everyday awareness by choosing to passively view the installation and not engage. Not actively engaging implies both passivity in not physically interacting or questioning the option to engage.

The video shows one person in a white walled and wooden floored room moving in space. The video contains no narrative. This is the key feature of the video, emphasizing the contrast between current state and constructed reality. Narrative is inevitable in life, for life is a series of events. The lack of narrative is seconded by the constant unchanging background and lack of connectedness within the person’s movements.

The projection itself continues to develop the metaphor of constructed versus an authentic current state. The sheets act as false dividers, meaning the sheets function as a tool to divide the space and projection. Thus, the projection, the open space of the passageways, and the space in which the projection exists are important. The archways act as a means to an end. The archways serve as a way to engage the viewer, to expand the space the projection occupies, and

allows the viewer to move within the installation. Nothing is literally accomplished from walking through the arch. Instead, an experience can be created through the shift of focus to the present and attention given to the body. Within the projection, the video creates a simplified and untouched (and therefore superficial) reality in which movement (the body) instead of narrative is precedent. The pristine quality of both the sheets and the contents of the video are important because these aspects minimize the focus given to the projection, allowing for an internal shift of perception in the viewer. Created by the archways, distortions occur in the video as the projection travels through space, and less obviously through time. These distortions mimic the distortions our memory gives past events. Distortions occur as the memory is rethought through time.

To continue with the questioning of authenticity and the present, I aim to explain the idea of 'through'. The word 'through' comes to the forefront when considering bodies, experience, and time. We are born with a body not chosen by us, and through this body, we grow in both size and personality. In order to experience anything in life we have to go through the experience, in the same way as we go through something emotional or go through something physical. The body travels with us as we travel, feel, and experience. There is no avoiding going through life. All of these experiences are mind relating to body, consequently our thoughts relating to our body. The body reacts to our feelings: tears, a flinch, or a smile. These reactions occur simultaneously with our thoughts, thus the reactions occur in the present. These methods of self-awareness bring together body and thought in the present.

The exploration of authenticity continues with *On*. The work *On* is a floor piece composed of wooden boards (Figure 2). This eleven foot by fourteen and a half foot sculpture encompasses the entirety of a floor in a white walled room. Being set in a separate room allows

the piece to be a destination and not a means to get anywhere. In addition, separation of the piece from an open space creates a situation in which the viewer has to make an important choice to enter and engage in the piece or view the piece from the doorway. This decision to enter relates to the projection in that the viewer must actively choose to engage with the work. Both pieces can be viewed without interaction; however, presenting the viewer with a doorway gives the viewer a choice. Standing before the door will allow the viewer to stay inside their head, potentially engaging with their body in a mental awareness of self, however, not fully leaving the mental realm. In choosing to pass through the doorframe, the viewer has the opportunity to focus on their body. Focus is given to the body because the floorboards are uneven in height, and shift from side to side when stepped on. Having to watch their step, viewers will inherently have to bring attention to the present and increase their bodily awareness. The fear of falling affects body and ground awareness. When part of the body changes, as it does when walking across an uneven floor, more awareness is given to the body. The body “necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses” (Leder 14). However, “[p]ain can... overcome focal, background, and depth disappearance alike” (Leder 71). I assert that fear of pain, such as the fear of falling, will also bring about awareness of the body.

On is a mechanism, a way to create bodily awareness within the viewer. In contrast, the projection contains metaphors surrounding the idea of authenticity. For this reason, the floor piece is a more literal and corpus experience. This work centers around the idea that “[t]he body... is never just an object in the world but that very medium whereby our world comes into being” (Leder 5). To illustrate the intention to question bodily absence, I made the floor piece about neither the floor nor its materiality. The floor is a mechanism. Also, the floor creates a contrast between the ideas of authenticity and the constructed/unauthentic distressed finish. The

work's surface visually shows an intentional deconstruction, representing the deconstruction of time and the barrier that blocks ourselves from perceiving our bodies. This deconstruction is seen on the surface of the piece. The distressed finish becomes the focus, not the wood. The gaps in between the boards and the variety of size, shape, and quality of wood do not correspond to a floor. Therefore, the piece becomes a visual deconstruction of a surface.

Underneath the floorboards of the wooden sculpture, I chose to paint the floor black. This decision was made to keep with the minimal aspects of the piece. The gaps and spaces between the boards are not emphasized or brought to the forefront. The space between the floorboards references gaps in bodily awareness because there are no moving floorboards and the focus does not need to be given to the body. This reflects the subtle and unintentional separation between the body and the mind, and the bodily awareness falling into the background. Although the work encourages an active awareness of the body, these gaps present a contrast to this awareness.

These two pieces highlight different aspects of authenticity. Firstly, the present is authentic. Thoughts are authentic in the present and so is the body. The mind becoming aware of the body brings thoughts to the present to deal with the present body, the authentic. In *Through* the projection addresses authenticity due to the nature of video: video is a constructed reality. Authenticity is approached in a cerebral way, by the contrast between the video and the viewer. Whereas *On* addresses authenticity through the need to watch one's footing: thoughts are concerned with the current state of the body. These pieces relate to the exploration of authenticity, becoming aware of the self in space. Awareness in space brings a focus to reality, to the present. The works strive to express an experience that compels the viewer to become present in their body. Through achieving awareness of the self one can experience the

authenticity of the present and of the body. The ability for an individual to recognize their own thoughts, authentic thoughts, and know how his/her actions relate to their authentic thoughts “is indicative... of authenticity” and an incongruence “between these aspects... [can lead to t]he subjective experience of not knowing oneself, or feeling out of touch with the true self” (Wood 386).



Figure 1



Figure 2

Works Cited

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