Practice-led Research into Commitment, Devotion and Belonging in the World with Reference to Two Indian Contemporary Artists
ABSTRACT

Commitment, Devotion and Belonging in the World with Reference to Indian Contemporary Art: research into ideas about being and contemplation through the possibilities and pitfalls of cross-cultural devotion and hybrid cosmologies. The sculpture deals with the devotional approach and crisis of faith in physical and psychological expression. A study taking the form of an exhibition of sculpture, performance and video exhibited at the ANU Burgman College Multidenominational Prayer Space from August 24-29, 2009 which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component, together with a Dissertation and the Exegesis which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

Declaration of Originality

I, Hanna Hoyne, on 25th October 2010................................. hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.
I would like to thank my partner Siva Poobalasingam and my parents Doris and Trevor Hoyne for their love and support throughout this project.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this PhD project was to create sculpture that reflected ideas about being, contemplation and the possibilities and pitfalls of cross-cultural devotion. The concept of my entire project has been about weighing up the virtues and vices of belief, hope, doubt and skepticism in the context of cross-cultural belonging reflected in art practice.

This project is couched in the larger experience of otherness and acculturation through my own experiences of migration from Germany to Australia at the age of thirteen in 1987. In my family context, the religious cultures of India (Hindu, Bhakti, Buddhist, Islamic and Sufi) have instanced particular affinities. My PhD project has been, through my sculpture, to make note of the contradictions I face culturally and intellectually. I aspire to make room for a conversation with the orientalist, the accolyte and the skeptic within me and to do justice to my current position as a new Australian citizen, that is: to be Western and peripheral at the same time, located in the apparently post-colonial Asia-Pacific.

My field of reference in the first phase was Indian (in particular Hindu and Bhakti) devotional culture that grew to an inquiry into the nexus of Western and Indian contemporary art. My studio research remained concerned with the problems of hybrid cosmologies and the paradoxes of theisms. The practice-led research deals with apotheosis, the devotional approach, belief and crisis of faith in physical and psychological expression. The mysticism of Bhakti culture interests me because it

1 Since then, my family has experienced many conflicts in needing to validate the migration to a periphery far away from Europe to those left behind there. In some way, migration has brought to fruition longstanding interests of certain family members on my mother’s side; most notably the projects of study of “primitive” cultures of my widely-travelled maternal grandfather Friedrich Kruse, whose travel-slideshows I witnessed (in the first row) as a child.
historically harnesses doubt and humour, irreverence and idiosyncrasy to the effect of a greater understanding of humanity rather than cosmology.

My work has evolved from small to over-life-size figurative sculptures referencing icons and the formal attributes and architectural conventions around them. The pedestal and its implications in religion as well as art became the main formal vehicle with which to contemplate the dualistic separation of divinity and devotee; of mind and body, object and viewer. The leading question became how to formally merge the site, paraphernalia and subject of a spiritual experience. The formal elevation of the plinth could both engage and distance the viewer. The final objects reference the Modernist white cube, the Minimalist object, the Baroque church altar and the visual culture of Hindu icons.

Equally consistent in my works has been the use of Chinese Joss prayer paper for its fake gold leaf. Its symbolism and actual cultural use of being ceremonially burned is crucial to me, as well as its “faux” value. In the multi-denominational prayer-space of the final exhibition, the objects and performance are framed within a floor made of gold-leafed tiles.

My early works had seen the body in performance, followed by a period of self-supporting sculptures without the body. In the PhD project, the body in performance reappears in its mid and final stages, as the pedestal becomes wearable, merging the body, the icon and its formal elevation. In the examination work the performer will be myself in video projection onto the wall (bringing with it narrative and didactic elements).

For my fieldwork, I learnt Hindi for all of 2005, and then in 2006 I spent four months in India, interviewing 18 contemporary artists and 25 people related to the arts industry. I also spent two weeks in Singapore to see the inaugural 2006 Singapore Biennale titled Belief.

My fieldwork and Dissertation initially broached evidence of cross-cultural religious paradoxes reflected in Indian contemporary art. However, very soon the term devotion
became an insufficient and inappropriate descriptive clause. My ideas on art practice needed to be revised into related aspects such as human interconnectedness and social justice. Hence I established the terms “belonging” and “commitment” as my starting point. Rather than devotion evidenced within art practice, I was interested in what artists struggle to effect through devoted, ethical art practice. My Dissertation looks at the way art-practice can become synonymous with a kind of applied ethics. Ideology, national identity, cultural affiliations, devotional premises and ethical practice are compromised in the production and reception of works of contemporary art practitioners from the peripheries. The Dissertation explores how artists from the Third World (currently theorized as the Global South) negotiate the term “contemporary” in their art practice.

The identity of these artists is already in a problematic relation to the contested idea of the “West” (or previously “First” World). Coming from the Global South, and yet belonging to the “contemporary” has commonly carried the stigma of lacking the progressive and generative ability heralded of Western art.

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2 The “Third World” is an outdated term that has also been theorized as “Third Space” or the “Global South”. These theorizations are a reaction to dominant binaries such as First/Third worlds, East/West, Euro-America/Asia, North/South, center/margin, civilized/savage, capital/labour, enlightened/ignorant. “Third Space” was developed by Homi Bhabha in “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207 – 21 and Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 2004), 28 –56. Most instructive to the implications of the “Global South” is Étienne Balibar’s “Outlines of a Topography of Cruelty: Citizenship and Civility in the Era of Global Violence”, Constellations Volume 8, No. 1 (2001): 15-29. See also Murray, “Keys to the South”, 23-38; Muecke, “Cultural Studies Networking Strategies in the South 39-51; Connell, Extracts from Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science”, 53-73; Jolley, “The South in Southern Theory: Antipodean Reflections on the Pacific”, 75-98; in Australian Humanities Review, Issue 44, (2008)

3 The notion of contemporaneity as a temporal term has a questionable relation to change in the theorizations of modernity and postmodernity, globalization, and decolonization. The relevance of these terms as we comprehend and describe the present moment is interrogated in a collection of essays in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee (Eds), Antinomies Of Art And Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

4 Dipesh Chakrabarty’s explains the the negative implications on post colonial subjectivity and history writing through the dominant concept of the “West”. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice
In its final state, the Dissertation looks at the work of two Indian contemporary artists from urban Bombay, Tushar Joag and Shilpa Gupta. They straddle the palpable and imaginary cultural divides between “East” and “West”. At first glance their work has a “global contemporary art look”. I chose these artists because their work in fact yields a very refined local specificity that is produced from awareness of its social historical and political position. What drew me to analyze the work of these artists with my own terms “devotion”, “commitment” and “belonging”, was that it became clear that the subversive dialectic of Gupta and Joag’s works refused a simplistic overlay of these terms. My project would fail if I tried to pin down any element of their practices to a stereotypical “Indianness”, or a universalist spirituality that betrayed an irrational religiosity, or a Nehruvian socialist idealism, or hidden desires to be more enlightened, and Western. In fact, their works do actively engage those ideas in order to deconstruct and question them from a number of perspectives. Both artists are pronouncedly political. They are aware of the traditional, colonial modern and post-colonial discourse surrounding art produced in their own contexts, and from post-modern and globalization discourses of contemporary art production in the Asia-Pacific region since the early 1990s.

Current art production sees some common artistic strategies that are also adopted by Gupta and Joag. In contemporary art discourse the terms “identity”, “belonging” and “self-representation” have been a key preoccupation for artists from the peripheries. Both artists mimic and play with ideas of national identity, stereotyping, multicultural hybridity, and cultural appropriation.

From the interviews I conducted with the artists in Bombay, I saw how they mobilized skepticism and irony in their works. However, I became certain that there was a utopian

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yearning and idealism that neither artist could reconcile with their realities. I was also impressed by their highly self-reflexive discussion in interviews. There was clear evidence of this self-reflexivity in their work. What I appreciated most about both artists is that they place themselves in their works as scapegoat, as martyr, as joker, as loser. This betrays their vulnerability and their humanity. Both perceive their profession to be in a kind of crisis of ethics, and yet persistently grapple with the logistical and theoretical problems of the production and reception of their works, while still finding poetic expression. In sum, they interrogate, rather than illustrate the ideals of “devotion”, “commitment” and “belonging” in a way that reflects back on to the viewer.

The major written components –Dissertation and Studio Practice Exegesis - complement each other. The Dissertation has served to answer certain questions that have been at the base of my professional practice as a visual artist. Gupta and Joag’s works are emotive, ironic and usually implicate the viewer. Through an engagement with this work, I was forced to evaluate my own terms more carefully. Through my own studio practice, I analyzed my influences and affiliations that have formed my subject position. They are biographical, social, philosophical, spiritual and geo-political. They are also constantly changing.

I have attempted to dismantle my identity’s visual and ideological appropriations - its hybrid cosmology - and to investigate each part theoretically. It became apparent that in fact no part of my identity is static or fixable to any particular system of thought or group. My affiliations shift with and through my social networks. So I have sought to test some of my beliefs discursively in dialogue with other practicing artists in India, Singapore and Australia. As a result, my ideas of commitment and belonging have been stretched, and my artistic position analysed. In turn, the collaborative and performance impetus of my work has been strengthened and clarified.
1.1 Cosmic Recharge

_Cosmic Recharge_ is the title for the final examination exhibition of this PhD project (2005-2009). The title is both, tongue in cheek and sincere. In this way my role in the work is that of the acolyte and the sceptic. While the word “cosmic” pertains to the laws of the universe, in connection to the word “recharge” it conjures a somewhat superficial tone of the New-Age philosophies and the technological futurism of Science Fiction. Evoked is an art that broaches the “spiritual”. In view of Modernist and Postmodernist histories, this is a precarious position in which to place the art work. The intentions behind this project, however, are to sincerely reflect on the nature of belief and doubt and the role of art in the contemporary world. This Exegesis will begin with a discussion of conceptual terms that contextualize the project, and go on to describe the work formally in chronological order. The conceptual terms that have served this project are: the sacred and the formal relations between the icon, the pedestal and the aura in Modern art; postmodern theories of dance/performance; a theorization of devotion and sacred space.

1.1.1 The Spiritual

To begin, it is useful to look at some definitions and relations between terms that seem acceptable in the framework of this project. Foremost, my project addresses the spiritual in art in terms of identity and belonging. I see artists' engagement with the spiritual in art
as a desire for connection and to raise questions of an ethical identity. Devotion I understand as a critical method of orientation in the imagination and the world. The project also attempts to transfer some of the agendas and methods of devotion on to art practice. However at no stage is the work satisfied with the platitudes of universals, or sure of their promised effects. While my sculptures formally harness the affect of sacred spaces, they also obviously cater to the idiosyncrasies - rather than ideals - of the psyche. I was looking to create an abstracted sense of sacred space that can be carried with the maker as opposed to a sacred place, or site. The wearable sculptures pose a question to the viewer about his/her own agency and imagination, in that they provide a phenomenological, time based experience. So it is intended that the seeming display of cosmological order and sanctity in the exhibition act to also encourage sceptical reflection.

From the beginning of this project, it has been a challenge to negotiate the overt religious connotations of its key term – “devotion”. Modernist giants like Wassily Kandinsky, Joseph Beuys, Barnett Newman, Agnes Martin, Ad Reinhardt, and contemporaries like Marina Abramovic and Bill Viola (amongst many others) ascribe to art a spiritual dimension of apparently transformative powers. In my search for “the spiritual”, the attitudes of my own early influences of the works of John Cage, Bruce Naumann and the Fluxus movement became more pronounced in their invocations of the pedestrian (or vernacular), physical limitations and the refusals to settle for universal platitudes.

In the discourse of the present day, faiths, social belief structures and market forces compete, leaving the “spiritual” in art as contentious at best, if not obsolete. For this reason, my attention has been balanced between artists who merge traditional myth and popular culture through the use of performative artifice, such as Matthew Barney or Mariko Mori (but more specifically the Indian artists of my fieldwork, such as Shilpa Gupta, and Pushpamala N and Clare Arni); and those who stage their political refusals as illustrations of their crisis of faith in performance, such as Mike Parr (or in the Indian
context Sonia Khurana, Vasudha Thozur, Sharmila Samant and Tushar Joag). At the 2006 Singapore Biennale (Belief), the works on display addressed everything from grace and miracle to hellfire, to doubt and atheism. This provided me with a kind of snapshot survey of the spiritual in contemporary art, and some of these impressions have powerfully inflected on my working ideas.

Throughout this project (while initially not quite clear because of my preoccupation and engagement with new materials), the basic quandary of performance - to act and/or enact - has been the structuring principle of the sculptures. Acting or enacting are both existential -and thus 'spiritual' - questions, couched in the paraphernalia of the everyday.
1.2 Precedents: How to Encounter Art and Suspending Disbelief

In *The Human Touch*, Michael Frayn talks about the reader “entertaining a story”—rather than the author and story entertaining the reader. He states that “The phrase ‘suspension of disbelief’ is misleading. No normal reader of fiction for a moment believes that the fiction is true; rather, you go along and live it. [...] The simple dichotomy of fact and fiction is misleading: just as true and false, games and reality have different uses in different contexts.” Frayn’s idea of deliberately entertaining a story for the sake of having an experience through play is very central to my performance practice. It’s not so much about my anxiety to engage the viewer, or another in performance. The viewer is actually a readily activated component in the discursive life of an object.

Figure 1. *The Singapore Miracle* by IEPE (Iepe B. T. Rubingh) 2006

Miracle stories are a basic part of the foundations of religious consciousness used to justify doctrine. At the Singapore Biennale 2006, the artwork by IEPE (Iepe B. T. Rubingh) *The Singapore Miracle* 2006 addressed the suspension of disbelief necessary for an experience of a miracle. The work was a tree in a park that rains when one comes near it. This work was not technically perfectly resolved, but I really liked it for its intervention in public life and its demand of the viewer to be startled and suspend disbelief. Rain and water have always been sources of life, and are becoming an increasingly valuable commodity in the present world. It was nice to the playful evocation of the impossible in a city where the human control of money seems to make everything possible only for the privileged. I purchased several vials of the Miracle tree's water at the Biennale shop as a keepsake.

1.2.1 Transformation and Transcendence in the Art Encounter

David Morgan’s distinctions in the agendas behind evoking transcendence or transformation in art has been useful in view to the effect/affect of my own works. In the contemporary world, transcendence is very hard to believe. Therefore in the past, while my works seemed to address *transcendence*, I have used performance in my work to initiate *transformative* experiences in the viewer. I have placed them in a participatory role in garments and sculptures that hyperbolically suggest the religious, are theatrical, and are larger than life, and suggest psychological functionality.

Morgan, in his analysis of the spiritual in Modern art, separates the ideas of transcendence and transformation in the actual encounter with an artwork. In invoking "transcendence", he suggests that there is a *mystery* present in the work, and that this stages an encounter with the metaphysical. Mystery promises that it will reveal itself in the transcending of reality. But in invoking "transformation", the viewer confronts an *enigma* in the artwork. This is unsettling for the viewer, as it suggests that there is something not right in the world. The mystery premises an idealist thought of union, elevation, of mystical wholeness that achieves transcendence. The presence of the enigma, however, cancels this kind of "contract" with the sacred and the idea of
completion, union and presence. In the encounter with enigma, the self faces limits. Here the self refuses perfection in order to preserve radical openness, to transform itself, to transform doctrines and the ordinary. Morgan argues, the transcendent force evoked in mystery has the potential to effect change in the world by the symbolic power of art. The transformative force evoked by the enigma is to change the viewer and their perception of the world.

Figure 2. Thomas Ochoa, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 2006 shown at Inaugural Singapore Biennale of Contemporary Art “Belief” [catalogue], 2006

Thomas Ochoa’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 2006 at the Singapore Biennale was a gripping example for me that addressed the ideas of both transformation and transcendence.

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7 (Text of that person’s opinion as I recorded it from the video) “There is a feeling of revenge, of hate, and of a person that has nothing to lose. If you are driven by a religion, then it’s something else. If you are influenced by someone, then perhaps you are not just angry, but you are afraid. Because they are asking themselves: Am I doing the right stuff? Is that what really drives me? They have probably questions they can’t answer in that moment...If you don’t give people an option, then it’s difficult. You need to give them an option, otherwise there is no way to come out of this problem”. Thomas Ochoa’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 2006 shown at Inaugural Singapore Biennale of Contemporary Art “Belief” [catalogue], 2006
through the work. The documentary style artwork itself conceptually addresses transcendence through death by suicide. The work comprises two perpendicular video projections in a darkened room with subtexts. Randomly chosen passersby are asked about their opinion on what they think the last thoughts in the mind of a suicide bomber are. The locations are in the public places of Marrakech (Morocco) and Zurich (Switzerland). So one immediately gets a polarization of views: Muslim contra Eurocentric.

To me, some of the suppositions offered by the people in Zurich seemed vague and – while clad in good will- incredibly patronizing and ignorant. I found this work tragic and perceptive. The encounter with the artwork to me had a transformative effect (affect) as it presented an enigma, the question of the afterlife. It made me reflect on life and the uncertainty of cultural and religious values. It also reinforced the need for such hopeful concepts as paradise and the afterlife for human beings born into geo-political crisis not of their own making.

1.3 Performing Sculpture

The return to performance in my sculpture can be understood through the context of my work since 1995. Most of my objects before my Masters body of work were all performance based. I have directed and collaborated with other artists, dancers and performers in a variety of ways. My main point of entry to performance has been through dance practice. I was very interested in the involvement of the body, embodiment, and the psychological moment a person can have with a wearable work of

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8 Curator Irma Arestizabal states: “Sisyphus is an absurd hero not only because of his passion but also because of his torment.” Ochoa makes a value judgement on the self imulation through his choice of title that the work itself does not do. See Irma Arestizabal in Inaugural Singapore Biennale of Contemporary Art Belief [catalogue], 2006, pp 98-99

9 Masters Visual Art (Research), RMIT Melbourne, 2000-2004. These were wearable protection suits called Protectornauts suspended in space without people inside.
Early on I was concerned with the interior and exterior perception, "getting ready" inside a sculpture to act or enact; literally to exteriorize interiority.

I used to offer my artworks to others to inhabit or wear as a site for a spontaneous transformative experience. The works were destroyed in the process of being performed. I have also performed in objects myself, usually veiled from the viewer. The barrier between myself and the viewer acted to emphasise the activated interior of the art object. During the Cosmic Recharge project, the exhibitions for the *A Cage Opera* project with Anna Simic became laboratories to interrogate both ways of performing the object, through another person or through myself. In the final exhibition of this project, the objects are framed by a golden floor which separates the viewer from them and the projected images of myself in the space. So this floor acts as a kind of veil, or barrier. The fact that I am not present physically in the space also enhances the viewer's option towards activating the interior of the empty sculptures through their imagination. I will discuss some examples of precedents of my work that contextualize my present concepts.

### 1.3.1 Wearing "Centre": Locating the Subjectivity of the Viewer

In view of my own role as performer and/or director in performance works, it has been useful to look at the ideas of the participating viewer that has been developed in early postmodern dance by Merce Cunningham and Steve Paxton, and Randy Martin's "productionist text" as a contemporary notion developed from those. In my conceptual

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10 It has been helpful to read Schilling's theorization of the differences between embodiment and technology as compared to religious ideas of embodiment, and what is lost in contemporary experiences of embodiment. Chris Shilling, Philip A. Mellor, "Cultures of embodied experience: technology, religion and body pedagogics", *Sociological Review*, Volume 55 Issue 3, Pages 531–549, Published Online: 28 Jul 2007


11 In 1983 Copeland correlates the use of unstructured improvisations and the use of pedestrian movements to the Duchampian "found object" (objet trouve) as the "found" movement. Postmodern
framework the idea of "orientation" and "centre" correlate to Merce Cunningham's development of the notion of fractured space, the de-centralised stage, and that "center stage" is wherever the body is. In other words, on the stage the performer "carries" the "axis mundi", or centre, with him/her. This un-fixes the idea of the seemingly static, symbolic site and brings the focus back to the person's body experiencing it. Their own phenomenological psycho-spatial mapping becomes privileged. Relating this to Eliade's sacred space means that the "cosmic thresholds" are where the performer's consciousness finds itself at the centre of the universe - which could be anywhere!

My sculptures have been wearable or in some way able to accommodate the body within themselves. My attempt to facilitate a first-hand experience for the performer, echoes Randy Martin's idea of "productionist texts" in dance practice. These try to shift the reader's role into that of a quasi-dancer. This is in response to the "unrepresentable subject" of the dancer and the viewer. A dance piece, like a sculpture, is read from the outside for what it represents. However some dance works and sculptures are not produced with the outcome of signification in mind - they are produced through a language of abstraction, tactility, mark-making, phenomenology of space, movement and so on. 12
While my sculptures did not let the viewer emulate my mode of producing the works – for example their stitching, or cardboard construction – the viewer gets to "inhabit", change and destroy their final forms. The "inhabitation" is performative, aimed to simulate my second process in relation to constructing the works, where I try them on and spend time in them, contemplating their form and my body within them.

My work *Clouds*, 1995, was a performance staged for Open Day at the School of Art in Paris. I asked two of my friends to be inside giant paper-bags (stitched up drawings) that I called "Clouds". This three-hour performance climaxed by the clouds colliding noisily.

These *Clouds* were earth-bound on a wooden platform sunk into the floor, so anything that they tapped onto this floor echoed in the giant hall. We had made a tiny makeshift instrument for each performer. My directions were for the performers to be "present", to focus on their breath and to animate the clouds as...
and almost fighting because the performers could not stand their confinement anymore. Finally the empty cloud “skins” were dissolved in the rain outside. Witnessing this performance was exhilarating for me as it produced an objective position for me to observe my work. Documentation photography has served to reassert my control in the performance in the framing of images as the event is happening. Until 2001 I continued with the concept of destruction of the works during performance as this raised the stakes of participation.

Now I offer the work, but my demands on the performer are not the same. I am no longer sure of the power of the art experience for transformation. In Cosmic Recharge 2009, I offer the work to be entered conceptually as a site for a spontaneous transformative experience.

While my early objects gave the viewer-participant the option of stillness or frenetic action, in Cosmic Recharge, the stakes of engagement become much higher in form of a time-based experience. My current objects re-address the idea of giving the viewer a “task” with the object: I test this, through “reducing” the suggestion of the task through objects that imply contemplation. Stillness is required here and an “activated” waiting. I no longer want an actual embodied experience for the viewer, but a conceptual one.

though breathing when they heard or felt other people near them. I was filming from a distance as the hall was traversed by many people during the day. People would only accidentally notice the irregular movements of the clouds, and became transfixed, trying to work out how they were animated. I was asked if they were installed with hydraulics.

I have never displayed this photography on its own terms but have always felt that it could be in the future.

On the idea of offering the viewer not so much a “task”, but the idea of a possibility of embodied experience in the work, it has been helpful to read Chalmers on indexicality. It is theoretically argued that the difference between indexical knowledge (reading a trace and understanding it to mean something) and phenomenological knowledge (also called the truth of physicalism, as it refers to the physical knowledge of embodied experience) is not reconcilable. That is, that they are fundamentally different in the kind of understanding with which they provide the subject. For the purposes of my project, I was interested in the links of conceivability and possibility, not so much the epistemic gap between the physical and phenomenal domains. David J. Chalmers, “Imagination, Indexicality and Intensions”, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 68 (1):182-90., 2004
To solve this, I needed to consider how the viewer would read the residue of the performance, or its documentation. Auslander distinguishes two categories of performance documentation: the *documentary* and the *theatrical*.16 The question about the performative potential in the *eyes* (not in embodied action) of the viewer is argued by many. It is generally believed that performance residue in the form of objects or photographic (or other) documentation does not deliver an unmediated truth to the viewer about the performance. Wyman argues that photographic performance documentation and objects/residue stand *not* as replacements for but as supplements to narratives and experiences of performance. She contests the notion that performance objects speak straightforwardly for themselves. She suggests that they do refer to the performances to which they serve as indices. But she also states that the objects themselves, come to exist as entities separate from the performance.17 I accepted this idea that my objects on their own open up new possibilities for conceptual experience. However, it seems to be my own experience as maker and facilitator that I need to test *as performer*.

I have solved this potentially compromising restriction of my works by presenting them in such a way that I (myself) am inferred as present within them. If I am not physically present; I may be performing them in a digital projection in the same space. So these works are perhaps less heuristic and more illustrative. They reveal my ambivalence about the affect of the works on the viewer: the works are very static and solid, as opposed to pliable, wearable and ephemeral. But the current works also talk about the prospect of more durational disciplines that foster awareness of each moment.

By engaging the formal strategies of merging the icon, the devotee and the pedestal, I conceptually bring the onus back to the individual as the carrier and agent of belief, and


the original creator of experience. The work is customized to accommodate my body proportions. There is a contradiction inherent in this. I at once invite the viewer into my work as though I promise universal truths, but concurrently deny them access through the work being “lady’s size”, fitting my only body. The performance images also deny the viewer un-adulterated access to my works, as I become the agent of the performance experience. To me, my presence is the ambivalence in the work, that is, I am no longer preaching universals. Where the onus in my previous performance works was put back onto the participant (viewer), in this work, the onus stays with me.

1.3.2 “Acting” and “Enacting”

On postmodern performance, Steven Connor suggests that there is a “general condition of performativity at work in contemporary culture. [...] Ours is a culture saturated with and fascinated by techniques of representation and reproduction, that it has become difficult for us to be sure where action ends and performance begins.”

Improvisation has fascinated me because it is a kind of study-set up when I am in the role of witness.  

18 Paraphrasing Connor on postmodern performance it could be said that there it often uses strategies like: opposing two or more mutually exclusive universes (or culture, or knowledge frameworks) to coexist, highlighting that world orders are arbitrary; this is shown through coincidence, parallelisms, repetition, dislocation, displacement, mistranslation, fragmentation, anti-narrative, non-static view-points, anti-authorial accounting of subject positions and use of hybrid signifiers. Connor, “Postmodern Performance”, Analyzing Performance, A Critical Reader, edited by Patrick Campbell Manchester University Press, Manchester 1996, pp. 102-125

19 In dance theory, gesture is historicised as a movement language to signify meaning or states of being. Connor argues (citing Postmodern impulses in dance as originating in the 1950s) that performance tried to unhinge movement from such structures of signification, trying to create abstract, non-symbolic movement. Postmodern works often source from the pedestrian, quotidian experience of the body. Randy Martin states that “[...] to study the experience of dance is to isolate both the unique communicative aspect of the body and the moment of pure action of an unrepresented (and unrepresentable) subject.” The social dimension of dance encouraged the body to become theorized as a political site. The expression of the human condition, the non-verbal body, gender, race, religion and so on have came into focus in different historical instances of dance. The constant has remained the body itself- states of being and stimulation of the senses or of sentience. Martin says “dancer and choreographer [...] transform an empty space into a kinetic architecture, can reveal much about the more anonymous social physique that we all share. A study of how a dance is made, through the explicit direction and expression of the body, can therefore serve as a map for those felt but perhaps unknown reaches of social experience.” Martin is
equivalent in terms of the experience value of the sculpture. In return I have wanted to exchange roles and have the viewer’s experience. This has been a kind of testing of my work, measuring its evocative capacity, and the viewer’s imagination. My constructed moments (in forms of sculptural garments) have been posited against the freedom of spontaneous improvisation.\textsuperscript{20} The works for *Cosmic Recharge* present a paradox engagement for the viewer by either denying or inviting their body into the work, depending on which side one is looking at them. Their cavities and corporal negative spaces draw the body in; their monumentality and cool iconicity deny the body. I provide private stillness and solitude in the exhibition space, which invites immersion and physical exploration of the sculptures. But at the same time, I deny the viewer this freedom through inferring a church or temple like space where one is rarely really alone (not to mention the omniscient deities around), or allowed to get too close to the deities. In either case, the viewer cognitively completes the open-ended engagement with the objects. And it is exactly this paradox of closeness and distance in the experience of entering a religious site that I want to evoke.

Stephen Connor on the nature of performance begins his discussion with the tautology “to perform an action”. To perform simply means to act in certain ways. Performing engenders to complete an action, to accomplish, to make actual a latent possibility or to execute. To perform can mean to dissimulate, to feign, pretend, impersonate, double discussing the works of postmodern choreographers George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown and Alwin Nikolais. Randy Martin “Dance as a Social Movement”, *Social Text*, No. 12 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 54

\textsuperscript{20} Postmodern performance, according to Elizabeth Wright is: “the traditional distinctions between actor, playwright, director, stage manager, scene shifter, and spectator are eroded. The unity between voice and world are shown as fictitious. Speech has to compete on stage with other elements on stage such as music, sound effects, gestures, props, lighting, mime, mask. The most significant features of performance are the disturbance of the boundaries between artist and spectator, spectator and art ‘object’, art ‘object’ and artist. This form of subversively implicating the audience with what is happening on stage and vice versa has become the basic structure of postmodern performance. Elizabeth Wright, "Psychoanalysis and the Theatrical", in *Analyzing Performance, A Critical Reader*, edited by Patrick Campbell Manchester University Press, Manchester 1996, pp.177
imitate, to cite or repeat. So the difference in meaning really becomes about "acting" and "enacting". Connor looks towards these two opposite meanings of the words to cross and combine, that they compound action and enaction, immediacy and repetition, event and work.

In my performance works distinguishing "action" from "enaction" has been relevant, as my interest has always been with spontaneous, "ungroomed" creativity. Informed initially by Surrealism's Automatism, the Fluxus movement's ideas and later by the dancers Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark Smith's Contact Improvisation, the idea is that valuable personal "moments" can be found or unleashed. Between 1997-2000, living in Melbourne, I particularly followed the works and workshops of Al Wonder, the improvisation groups Born in a Taxi, Trotman and Morrish, Five Square Metres, and A State of Flux who perform Contact Improvisation and teach workshops with Nancy Stark Smith who developed the form with Steve Paxton in America in the early 1970s.

I have encouraged the self indulgence of the performer for the sake of discovering a playful truth. This is usually staged without an audience (except myself as witness), The presence of an audience brings a whole other problematic that I avoided for a long time, and still hold an ambivalent position on. The "acting or enacting" during performance makes improvisation and spontaneity very difficult. Real self-indulgence becomes almost impossible as it is embarrassing or boring to watch. This indulgence, however, to me, equals a kind of immersion or rapture that might be achieved in meditation. There can be an element of surprise in what the performer brings forth. This is vital to a real, self-generated experience facilitated by the sculptures. It has been my task to try to define

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21 Connor cites Derrida's discussion on the fundamental problematic of how difficult it is to really articulate the immediacy of any utterance, and how any act is somehow also an enactment. Derrida worked with the linguistic idea that the presentness of an action lies in the performative force of its enunciation— so the difference between what language says and what it does. He points to the struggle to separate out the "pure, unfolding action from enaction with a referential purpose — action which is from performance that means". See Steven Connor, "Postmodern Performance", in Analyzing Performance, A critical Reader, edited by Patrick Campbell Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, pp. 114
my notion of facilitating engagement and what it means for the relationship to my artistic practice.

There is an element of risk in improvisation. The overcoming of this kind pressurized situation (of “having to perform”) through a combination of focus and random abandonment into the absurd is perhaps a key to its appeal. Meditative practices as well as dance practice have a discourse about the compounding of the disciplines of intense focus and relaxation on stage. The main conceptual inquiry that I participated in with the A State of Flux group was “can improvisation really be performed?”.

The general themes and properties of my performance works have been the veil, an activated interior, and viewing to participate. During 1997-2000 living Melbourne I tested these ideas in a number of performance works.

Figure 4. Empapered Bodies, 1998, studio experiments performed at warehouse, Melbourne (performers Louisa Duckett, and Jacob Lehrer).

My works Empapered Bodies 1998, were a series of experiments that provided the performers with prepared paper constructions that sometimes were quasi-garments that
I presented to them folded. I directed them to unfold and explore them. These explorations (for me) opened a new language of the phenomenology of the body and space. Vocal improvisation elicited through the phenomenology of the body was a new idea that provided a break from literal or narrative connections.

From this I conclude that action and enaction do compound in my art performance works. There is a threshold that is crossed by the performer who engages with an art object/a performance, between acting and enacting. This can be more pronounced if there is an audience present. If there are fewer witnesses the performer may be more relaxed in negotiating between action and enaction, and self-consciousness to some degree can be by-passed to reveal new ways of acting and feeling. By inciting improvisational engagement with my works, I use this threshold to provide an opening for the performer’s desire to act/enact to be activated—and by extension to the viewer.

1.3.3 Audience: Transfers

To understand my own role in performance works, I have made diagrams of relations between the subjects and objects. (Through discussions with my peers I have concluded that the relation itself is also a kind of object.) The first diagram shows the link between artist and viewer through the object.

Artist >Object >Audience

Elizabeth Wright argues that the most “significant features of postmodern performance are the disturbance of the boundaries between artist and spectator, spectator and art

22 I worked with various performers, but my main collaborators were Duckett and Lehrer, who worked with me over a span of three years (1997-1999) in various locations. We mainly experimented in my own or local dance studios. These performers were both dance-trained, practiced meditation, Yoga and Tai Chi. Jacob had a strong improvisation practice through his work with “A State Of Flux Dance Company” (Contact Improvisation), “Five Square Metres” (movement and voice improvisation) and monthly “Conundrum” performance nights. I was also participating in classes, jam sessions and workshops with these companies. Cecil Street Studio in Fitzroy and Cubitt Street Studio in Richmond were the locations used. For more information see Shaun McLeod, “Cecil Street Studio: improvised community and sustainable practices”, Deakin University, Melbourne, Conference Proceedings: “Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid” Published by Ausdance National, December, 2005
"object", art "object" and artist. To subversively implicate the audience with what is happening on stage and vice versa has become the basic structure of postmodern performance.  

Wright, explains that in Freudian psychoanalytic spectator theory on theatre, the spectator's subject position is deferred into the actor's. The spectator thereby experiences vicariously through watching. Through this reading of artworks, "art offers a lure, setting up a new category of object in the field of illusion" that lures the spectator into a collusive pact with the performer. But Wright refutes this as too simplistic a catharsis that only placates the audience and ends up re-legitimizing their narcissism and repressions. Post Freudian Theatre and Postmodern theatre break from the idea of sublimation and the spectator as origin of meaning. So the boundaries are eroded between spectator and artist: meaning becomes discursively produced.

My "lure" to the viewer and performer has been the wearability and hyperbolic designs of my garment structures. Their exaggerated features encourage the performer to transcend their own reservations. This would present a discursively produced meaning. The still objects of Cosmic Recharge invite the body into themselves, and thus offer the viewer the possibility to interpret their own body to fit the cavities. In this way, understanding them happens discursively—that is, reciprocally.

However, it becomes more complicated when there is a mediator, the performer, between the object and the audience.
So, the second diagram is more complex, when I ask a performer into my work. It reads:

Artist > Object > Performer > Audience

The performer is not only a "mediator" of my sculptures to the audience. This has been a very important point of discussion with my supervisors but has not really resolved itself in my mind. In this set up, I privilege the experience of the performer over affect of the sculptures on the viewer. This has been problematic in my production of hard sculptures for the PhD project. The objects needed to be read in their own right, adding a body and interaction at times seemed an unnecessary interference.

Certain postmodern dance theory attempted to divide audience participation by its effect upon the viewer. For example, Roger Copeland has analyzed the differences in choreographers' intentions for audience participation as "analytic" or "therapeutic". I have frequently used the idea of "facilitating" experience through my artworks. Is there a narcissistic agenda behind a kind of altruism? If so, what does that mean for the works? And to what effect does the artist imagine themselves as a facilitator through the artwork? Does it engender a kind of art-therapy? Alternatively, am I making empathetic portraits that are relational and somehow autobiographical? What is the role of the performative exchange when I am acting as witness? What boundaries of the real am I pushing? Or am I simply extending the formal qualities of my objects by animating them with a body?

Randy Martin states that a "productionist text" of dance as a phenomenology of the body can serve to show the production of desire in the viewer. Martin states "the body is the seat of desire and desire is a mode of performance. Performance is always a

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25 Copeland cites choreographers like Yvonne Rainer, along with Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, and David Gordon as using the displacement of the "found movement" to increase, rather than decrease the physical and psychic distance to the audience, even if they made the audience mobile. Roger Copeland, "Postmodern Dance Postmodern Architecture Postmodernism", Performing Arts Journal, Vol. 7, No. 1, The MIT Press on behalf of the Performing Arts Journal, (1983), pp. 32.
production, a communication through action."\textsuperscript{26} The dancer's desire for action comes through responding to the choreographer's demand, and subsequently to the audience's demand. It is a "group's response to conditions of authority" that they transcend creatively. \textsuperscript{27}

Directing performance, I also target the desire (inherent) in the dancer /performer to move and act. By inciting them to an action relating to my object/sculpture, by default might come more movement impulses. Almost accidentally, the performer will engage his/her own movement or action motivations. Through a sense of exposure by being put on the spot, they "transcend the conditions of restraint". What began as my initial direction, or "domination", transforms into a kind facilitation of experience.

Another \textit{Empapered Bodies} work of 1997 was a performance that went for three periods over the course of a whole day in the public space of Canberra's Parliamentary Triangle. This work climaxed in a frivolous destruction process of meters and meters of butcher's paper. This performance was extremely rewarding for myself as witness and also the performers, as there was consensus that everyone had extended themselves somehow.

\textsuperscript{26} Randy Martin "Dance as a Social Movement", \textit{Social Text}, No. 12 (Autumn, 1985), Duke University Press, pp. 54

\textsuperscript{27} Martin states "the power of the sign recedes and the dancers become a collective social body intent upon moving an audience. The desire to act is produced in performance. [...] Domination creates the conditions of its own transcendence. Demand is realized as desire." Randy Martin "Dance as a Social Movement", \textit{Social Text}, No. 12 (Autumn, 1985), Duke University Press, p 57
My last diagram represents my question that will lead to the final exhibition of this project through my own presence in the work as performer.

Artist = Performer (Veiled Action)

There is a precedent in my practice for performing myself. This has been motivated through the idea of externalizing interiority, or immersive experience. Because in a sense I have not been looking for “mimetic immersion”, I often resolved this by putting a sheath/paper skin between myself and the gaze of others to keep the integrity of my internal experience. The exterior of my garment sculptures then functioned to hold the viewer’s attention.
Cloud Skin 1998, was an improvisation that I staged by myself to reverse the process of viewership that I had been practicing as witness during performances. I wanted to reinscribe the paper skins with my own phenomenological experiences. This might have been a result of feeling exhausted at times by consistent destruction of works in performances. Not all the performances felt successful and I needed recourse to the language of visual art as opposed to the language that embodies the transience of dance practice. The most striking thing that would irritate me and make me feel drained of creativity was when the performer could not lose self-consciousness and immerse themselves in the experience for whatever reason. In this experimentation I use the strategy of veiling and revealing and avoiding a reciprocal gaze with the camera.
Similarly in *Kitesend* 1998, and *Dot Painting* 1998, were collaborative performances with an audience where I retained a distance between the audience and myself opposite to the way that Yoko Ono for example let her audience near herself in the performance *Cut Piece* of 1964, where her clothes are gradually cut off until she is totally exposed.

*Kitesend* 1998, was a collaborative performance between an artist (myself), a dancer (Duckett) and an actor (Sulan). Each choreographed themselves and then combined all three in a choreography of non-connection of the gaze. Sulan was character driven, while Duckett shifted between Ballett and Tai Chi, and I remained veiled, traversing the space blindly. It was a long space that became very intimate when the audience crowded in. This gave an intensity and no movement was lost. Objectively, my blind insularity here was very effective as it polarized the frenetic trajectories of the other two characters. Reviewer Zsuzsanna Soboslay described the scene thus: "Miss seeing you. See missing you...The kits flown in *Kitesend* are the people themselves, the holders of the strings, a motley trio each lining different clouds. One is ruggedly nuggetty, one a controlled hysterical, the other an Issey Miyake mistake completely covered in an avalanche of paperfolds. Her own eyes papered invisible, she waves from atop her plinth to the others who do not see. The gesture is poignant and powerful in its minimalism. She slowly concertinas to the floor, supine to the others' erect continuous. An audience member pats her in her isolation. The moment is incredibly moving." Zsuzsanna Soboslay, "Tigers: Lou Duckett, Kate Sulan, Hanna Hoyne, *Kitesend*," in *A RealTime feature Report on the MAP Dance Season and Symposium in Melbourne*, Real Time 27, October–November 1998, p. 4

*Dot Painting*, 1998, was a performance set up so that one performer (myself) was hidden under the other's extensive skirt. Both had the task of painting red dots over their bodies. When Pont, the exterior performer was covered in dots, I emerged, also covered in red dots. The conclusion acted as a casual climax, and the work really was task orientated rather than posing for the audience.
Figure 7 and figure 8. *Kitesend*, performed for *Mixed Metaphor* media festival at Dancehouse, Melbourne (performers Louisa Duckett, Kate Sulan and Hanna Hoyne) 1998. Image of the artist (top) and Louisa Duckett (below)
Figure 9. Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, performed at Yamaichi Concert Hall, Kyoto, Japan, 1964. (Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive. 1964 Yoko Ono) in Kathy O’Dell, *Fluxus Feminus*, TDR (1988-), Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), p.54
During my Masters experiments I tried to eliminate the body entirely from the objects. *Winged Suit Taking Flight*, 2003 was part of a series of works where I let the object remain uninhabited. This work signified a clean break for me in letting my objects have a life of their own in space and in the imagination of the viewer.

To summarize this theory, the collaborative process entails a transfer of authority through an intensification of focus on subjectivity that can evoke, or transfer desire to

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30 My Masters body of work (RMIT Melbourne, 2000-2004) was a suite of 13 paper protection suits for the human psyche rather than the physical body. This was an installation test of the paper sculptures without the body. These protection suit prototypes called *Protectoronauts* were initially made to be worn, but finally I abandoned the body and let them be independent sculptures. I gained installation and sculptural skills at RMIT which I endeavoured to build upon during the PhD project in the ANU Sculpture Workshop.
the viewer. What I have not resolved for the PhD project is if/how this exactly can be transferred to the viewer through a performer present in the sculpture. Or, if the sculpture is more engaging on its own. I want the creative process to be democratized, to produce creative desire in the viewer. So in this sense my agenda could be seen as a kind of led, but discursive project. Thus its potential an for an active, engaged audience.
CHAPTER 2
THE PROJECT 2005-2009

2.1 Methodology

My working process has various levels, in that it links intuitive and visionary decisions to conscious and material actions. With my supervisor David Jensz, I have often discussed the kind of psychological “fog” space that I need in the studio work. It is a focused, immersive mindset where I try to suspend rational themes and theories when handling materials and forms. I liken this mindset to contemplative, or meditative space, where there is room for epiphanies, wonder and miraculous discoveries. In this way, I let chance and accidents in formal, experimental constellations suggest new possible outcomes to me, almost counter-informing the more literal objectives of my projects.

During this project I decided to let my methods of making be reflected in the surfaces and finish of my objects that are made with provisional materials. That the surfaces speak of the history of their making connects my ideas about producing artworks as prototypes that need to be tested in performance, and possibly bear physical traces of interactions with them.

There are usually two stages in the way that I work, although they can operate simultaneously, depending. The first is an intensive making period in the studio that will involve me trying the works on, i.e., testing my body within the work. The second stage, and to date this is the less-explored of my trajectories, is the installation of works (hard or soft) in spaces AND interacting with (or “inhabiting”) them in a publically performative way. My interaction with works is fairly private and in the past I have engaged others to
perform or "inhabit" them, while witnessing and taking photographic documentation. I am becoming more comfortable with the idea of performing myself.

2.1.1 Research Questions

My four research questions as I had developed them by June 2006 were:

1. To consider hybrid identities – autobiographical motivation/experience, entertaining multiple cosmologies as a basis for my practice-led research.

2. To investigate such concepts, themes, metaphors and how they may be understood to operate cross-culturally

3. Methodology: to investigate the work of other artists holding other beliefs, (specifically) working within and outside the world of contemporary art, both in Australia and in India

4. Through my own practice, investigate the challenges to myself, to others, to doctrines and to their theoretical frames.
2.2 The Sacred: Belief and Doubt

2.2.1 Doubt as Engine

It would seem impossible to broach the subject of the spiritual, belief and the sacred in art by ignoring its ever-present binary opposite, doubt. In fact, it has been largely the topic of my Dissertation to ascertain how artists respond to having their spiritual, cultural and ethical certainties severely compromised by the kinds of environment in which they live and work. I have been led by Nietzsche’s undoing of the binary of belief and doubt. He said: “Belief in the truth commences with the doubting of all those ‘truths’ we once believed.” Part of the Western art canon certainly has become Thomas McEvilley’s account of the historical place of doubt in the “Western” tradition, in *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt* and this reading has been wonderfully complemented by the “Eastern” scholars cited in Amartya Sen’s more recent *The Argumentative Indian*. Both focus on doubt’s liberating and socially integrative capacities.

Thus, as I stubbornly subscribe to the metaphysical rather than to a positivist stance, I have attempted to harness the historical truth finding value in skepticism and the liberating qualities of doubt for the handling of the spiritual throughout my project. I spent most of my reading on a kind of crisis of faith in humanity in works by Hanna Arendt and Frantz Fanon, Theodor Adorno, Michel Foucault and Paul Virilio. The critiques of colonialism and neo-imperialism by Geeta Kapur, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Amartya Sen have been harrowing to say the least; but in the voices of the “Third” world, I have also felt a kind of determination for survival.

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and “radical alternatives” (Kapur) to the present. Ihab Hassan’s ideas have been heartening to read and more importantly, to see my contemporaries and friends in India and in Australia stoically, revolutionarily, continue their art practices.  

Hassan states: "My point is simply that the idea of truth itself is in discount (...) This truth, never absolute or transcendental, can only rest [...] on trust, which itself rests on altruism, dispassion, a sense of kenotic self-heedlessness: [...] precisely because it knows both the void underlying all things and the interconnectedness of all things." Ihab Hassan, A Plague of Mendacity: A Plea for Truth, Trust, Altruism N. B. Different versions of this essay have appeared in Cream City Review 28, 2 (Fall 2004); and in An A B C of Lying, ed. Livio Dobrez, Melbourne: Scholarly Publications, 2004. Available online at http://www.ihabhassan.com/plague_of_mendacity.htm [cited 10 June2009]
A contemporary work that broaches doubt as empowering is Shilpa Gupta’s web based interactive art work *Blessed-Bandwidth.net* 2003. This work has inspired me throughout this project. Its irreverent humour and conceptual inversions go hand in hand with a sincere inquiry into what belief structures require from a devotee, and in turn, what the psychological needs of the believer are. She tries to engage the conscience and critical reflection in her viewers. (Gupta’s work is discussed at length in my Dissertation)³⁴

2.2.2 Identity - the Spiritual as Connectivity

David Morgan defines the spiritual in art as a discursive event, not a fixed state. He addresses the problem of spirituality through Ad Reinhardt’s 1964 polemical idea of “art as art” – the object as unique, of its own terms. He argues that art since 17th century has undergone a transfiguration: from the “sacred” context of religious devotion to what might be called the spiritual domain of aesthetic contemplation. Morgan sets down a definition of the word “spiritual”, in order to bypass its strictly religious, or cliché meanings. His definition firstly frames the spiritual as an “understanding or experience of the human self in connectivity to the world, in a vital relation to an other –not just any other, but a world or person or place that presents a compelling claim that can only be severed at great expense to one’s own well being”³⁵. Secondly, that it comprises of an ethical encounter with god or an other. He states “the spiritual is the relation that unfolds in one’s response to the other, bringing with it a new sense of personal identity” and “the spiritual in art consists of artistic configurations of human boundaries and their

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³⁴ Gupta took a USB network cable on a pilgrimage to several holy sited to have this cable blessed. She then plugged the cable into the server that supports the website where one can virtually enter each holy place and select to be “blessed”. The website is riddled with subversive features like pop-up windows from a self obsessed and narcissistic God.

³⁵ Please note that I am staying very close to Morgan’s formulation of these ideas in his text; however, the emphasis in the quote is mine. David Morgan, “Secret Wisdom and Self-Effacement: the Spiritual in Art in the Modern Age” in Richard Francis, ed., *Negotiating Rapture, The Power of Art to Transform Lives*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996 p. 36-38
negotiations in the experience in a work of art."³⁶ A work’s analysis may stress either the role of the artist or its reception or both, in turn. Morgan questions the avant-garde’s claims of transforming reality through the art work (i.e., in a “rapturous transposition of mind and matter”). Instead, he suggests that the “mythic exchange” of the spiritual in art and the viewer is in fact a negotiation where the viewer finds him/herself empowered to reinscribe their role in the world: to be a “determinant rather than determined”.³⁷

The sacred and the spiritual are meant to belong to the realm of religion. However, Morgan suggests that art and religion are often likened to each other in that they both formulate and require etiquette and response from a person. They also both address the object or act as constituting an end in itself. Both use “the metaphysical apparatus of transcendence” to legitimize and authorize “the fetishization of objects, words, and actions.” Both offer truths that cannot be grasped by the profane, they are set apart from the everyday, are revealed, liminal, not ordinary. Morgan launches a general social comparison of art and religion, in their social purpose for critical reflection and valorization of power. Of both, he distinguishes firstly, a cognitive purpose, and secondly,

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³⁷ The above paragraph is paraphrased from Morgan, who continues: “Perhaps it is enough to insist that the theurgy of art not be limit to the ontology of the autonomous work, but extended to the ethical encounter that offers us a moral existence. In a word, the spiritual in art is not contained in the work but unfolds in the real and imagined world of the work’s viewer. As such, the spiritual in art, if it is to perform the cognitive purpose of art and reflect critically on the nature of human existence, does not present ultimate solutions, but compelling questions, the consideration of which renews our pact with the future. [...] Art that explores [...] communities and institutions, art that tests democracy, art that invites the exercise of reasoned discourse remains spiritual and hopeful often by pursuing and apophatic or critical path. I do not wish to contrast enchantment and reason too starkly for they seem too inseparable in human culture: democracy portrays itself as a progressive, reason as egalitarian, and such communities as family, nation, and academy are immersed in rituals and myths that cast a heady spell.” “Secret Wisdom and Self-Effacement: the Spiritual in Art in the Modern Age” in Richard Francis, ed., Negotiating Rapture, The Power of Art to Transform Lives, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996 p. 34 and 47
the functional purpose. The functional purpose orders life, canonizes; the cognitive purpose is self reflexive, reflects, evaluates, and thus offers hope.  

Morgan also sees the spiritual in art operating as either through action, or through contemplation. Both ways address the limits of human identity.

Some artists that I encountered on fieldwork address the issues of human connectivity beyond the confines culture in their work. In the following works, religious origin becomes a departure for the artists to critique sectarianism, exclusion, racism and religious institutions.


39 Morgan two modes are: 1. the Faustian, and 2. the Kenotic. Both approaches address the limit (or threshold) to human personal identity. The Faustian sees an enigma, something secret that one desires to know. It diagnoses human suffering as ignorance and thus seeks secret wisdom or gnosis. This method is based on action. He cites as examples of this approach Joseph Beuys' utopian notions of social-artistic organization through the engagement with the supernatural and shamanism. The trans-national Fluxus movement also attempted to merge art and life through the engagement with chance in performance and happenings. Morgan's Kenotic sees a gripping experience that inspires a searching reassessment of prevailing wisdom. "Kenosis" literally means an emptying out of the self in the quest for something better. This approach diagnoses the world's problems as ontological, and pursues rebirth through transcendence of the human condition. This method is based on contemplation. Morgan cites Bruce Nauman and Bill Viola's works that engage with ideas of "rapture [as the] ecstatic transcendence of conventional categories [that try to dismantle] the tenacious cultural edifices of anthropocentric projection". Their works "probe the metaphysics of matter and spirit".

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N.S. Harsha's work *Cosmic Orphans* 2006, comprised a floor painting on the roof top of the Sri Krishnan Temple (Hindu) in Singapore for the 2006 Biennale *Belief*. In my mind, this work relates directly to the gold-leafed floor that frames the objects in my final exhibition. There question that is raised of what one is morally and ethically stepping on when entering a supposedly sacred space. In Harsha's work, the human bodies both act to draw the viewer in and to distance them, to confront the viewer with problematic ideas of territories and boundaries of shelter, humanity and culture. In my work *Cosmic Recharge*, the pastiche of the valuable floor encourages the viewer to suspend their
disbelief, activate the sacred space through their imagination, but simultaneously raises questions about sanctity, creative agency in experience, belief and doubt.

Vasudha Thozur is a painter who produces quasi-mystical self-portraits. Thozur deliberates at length on the political impact of art on her context from Baroda that saw the genocide of the Gujarat Riots in 2002 and more recently extensive art censorship at the Maharaja Sayajirao University that included the suspension of the Dean, Shivaji
Pannikkar. Her painting, *Self Portrait on a Funeral Pyre* 2005, sees her critiquing self-immolation for the sake of religion. It juxtaposes her own automatic language as symbols behind her. The image speaks of a more intuitive and visionary approach with which to navigate the world.

Figure 17. The photograph shows Thozur with the siblings of the Gujarati Muslim women holding up their works.

Apart from painting, Thozur teaches and is involved in activism. When I visited Thozur in 2006 to interview her, she took me *Himmat* (Courage) in Ahmedabad to run a two-day video workshop with the women she has been teaching there. The 2002 Gujarat riots destroyed the families of these women in the carnage of a single night. Thozur has been
doing art workshops with the young women that try to facilitate healing and articulation of their memories and current situation. 41

41 “This is the story of women who were widowed and lost their near and dear ones in the Naroda-Patiya (Ahmedabad) carnage in 2002. Helped by Monica Wahi and Zaidahmed, some of these women got together to form a collective effort that would revitalize their livelihoods and rejuvenate their lives. Himmat has also encouraged these women to take up other activities which they could only dream of earlier. Art: Since January 2004, artist Vasudha Thozur from Baroda has been involved with the adolescent girls from Himmat in an art project supported by IFA, Bangalore. This project has taught the girls creative skills which enables them to articulate their understanding of their own lives and the world around them. Recently four girls from this group have also been awarded an art fellowship by Drishti Media Collective. The girls will enact street plays and “prabhat pheris” and present their art work as part of the programme.” Monica Wahi, “Himmat In Gujarat” in Asha Sanctuary, Sanlaap- Tomorrows Foundation [Conference], Kolkata 2006 [online resource] [cited July 2009] available at: http://www.ashanet.org/focusgroups/sanctuary/sanctuary2/souvenir.pdf
When I saw Nuha Asad's *Faces with One Feature* 2006, at the Singapore Biennale, I had a split response to it. The contemporary rendition of what reminded me of Magritte’s *The Lovers* series (1928). Yet here I see no loving and am transported into the multicultural present. The red cloth is iconic, like a humorous creature but at the same time ominous as the people sit rigidly as though waiting to be shot. There are no expressions visible.

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42 Photo from the series "Faces with One Feature", 7th Sharjah Biennial 2005. In reference to this, Nuha Asad says: "Essentially the people are equal, although they might differ regarding their origins, culture, economic situation, or social status. My work is about the humanity in us all, even though I don't aspire to erase the differences between us. Difference is a basic attribute of nature, and something that I accept while focussing on the thin line which separates our common humanity from our cultural and social differences." See Mahita El Bacha Urieta, London based curator and arts/culture projects producer. Recent work includes coordinating the Sharjah Biennial 7, 2005. [Online Resource] [cited 2009] Available at: http://www.universes-in-universe.de/islam/eng/2005/11/asad/img-07.html
beneath the cloth. I felt a little bothered by the preoccupation with the veil in this female Muslim artist's work. I now think that this feeling betrayed my own arrogance thinking that cultural eclecticism was being exploited. When I saw the performance work that conceptually accompanies these images, I felt that the formal solution was more powerful in the *discursive* event as opposed to the images, however iconic. The performance in the Sharjah Biennial in 2005 addressed the implicated Muslim majority in the audience more directly. The red veil is a long cloth that is carried by many people that hold and drape it over themselves. The blood red, fluid and elastic connection makes a powerful statement about the idea of the religious veil and human connectivity.43

2.3 Experiments 2005-2006

2.3.1 Gods for Small Things

Figure 20. Installation view of early experiments with “Gods For Small Things” 2005

The early experiments for this project loosely referenced Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*; it comprised of idiosyncratic, personalized “take-home deities”. \(^{44}\) I admire Roy as an activist and writer, and her books, widely read in the West, conjure a particular image of the stereotypical Indian family psyche. \(^{45}\) Early on I had felt an

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\(^{45}\) Roy’s activism attests to the economic aspirations of the Indian government and the frustrating complexity of ethical and humanitarian issues that pressurize this Third World democracy. A Western vision of the Indian family might be one of a deeply embedded religiosity, complicated by local
attraction to the complexity and visual splendour of Hindu iconography and its religious theory. I could imagine endless playful renditions and interventions as a benefit from it. I studied some of the formal conventions of Indian classic and religious art and architecture. I particularly looked at the sculptural conventions of icons, the lotus seat throne (padmasana) and the postures (mudra) that Indian icons (murti) take upon them. Icons are generally seen frontally, not in the round, so they will tend to be more ornate at the front. During the production of these small works, I started to question to whose benefit it really was in terms of visual appropriation, as I was also reconsidering the theoretical and ethical position of my Dissertation. I could not see my practical work evolving if it had to have too much of a literal connection to my Dissertation.

*Gods for Small Things*, represented a multiplicity of gadget-gods that any one person might need for the minutiae of the contemporary world. Through the advances of technology, our expectations to any gods would become ever higher, while rational and psychological processes are not necessarily given the same attention. In this sense, my gadgets become a kind of impersonal conscience.

superstitions, gender roles, sexuality and the conventions of family duty. The inherent contradictions and tensions in self-image, world views, commitment to tradition, modern rationalism and belonging in the globalized world interest me. It is through such a complex lens that any role for a personal god is cast, and its operations deeply dependant on the psychology of the individual.

46 Japanese contemporary art of the 1990s (particularly artists such as Mariko Mori, Hiroyuki Matsukage and Aida Makoto) paid heed to the phenomenon of economic boom in Japan and the effects of spectacularized manga- and cybertulture fusing with cultural mythology and the consumerist everyday. I have been aware of Japanese contemporary art since an ANU study-trip to Kyoto and Nara in 1996.
Through my own nuclear family’s interest in a living Indian spiritual teacher and associated retreats and ashram stays during my teenagehood, I had become familiarized with a theoretically watered-down version of the Indian Bhakti canon\(^47\). Through more research I found that the “Poet-saints” of the Bhakti movement were often extremely unconventional in their approach to the Divine, and very anti-establishment. This greatly

\(^{47}\) In researching Bhakti, I found that it has been categorized by western scholars since the 19\(^{th}\) century (many German scholars of Sanskrit amongst them) to be a series of trans-indian movements of enthusiasm around a variety of eccentric poet-saints (also called “sants”). These poets identified themselves through often iconoclastic behaviour, radical views on the individual’s claim to the love of god, and intense, (often eroticised or uncouth) hybrid devotional activity that would cross religious conventions. The Bhakti movements since medieval times are multifarious and really do defy classification. Their local efficacy has always been based on the social, political and historical moments in which their proponents lived. So has their social comprehension. These unusual people have often been sanctified post-mortem, and institutions built around their memories. Thus their teachings live on in a contradictory way. Please see “Bhakti” discussed in more detail in the Dissertation.
appealed to me as it legitimized the ready irreverence that runs throughout my work and at the same time grounds it in a sense of faith that answers to no one but itself. 48

My titles are often allegorical and locate my forms in my conceptual framework. Titles also give the impulse for an idiosyncratic narrative to develop alongside the formal qualities of a work, that give it its overall logic. Titles and “functions” would occur to me as the forms developed and strengthened or shifted as I added or cut away body parts. 49

Their anthropomorphic qualities sometimes approached machine-likeness; this formal connection evoked contemporaneity (rather than timeless antiquity).

The figuration of the objects was meant to evoke icons, in particular the kind of the Hindu pantheon that exist in India in domestic niche altars and wayside pilgrim stations (sometimes portable). These devotional stations are part of the Indian urban, domestic and provincial landscape and are addressed daily as though they are real habitations, presences or emanations of divinity. Devotions can consist of a passing greeting, or intense communion that might involve prayer, conversation, song, dressing (with custom made clothes), bathing with various substances, offerings, fire (such as incense or cooking).

48 The Lutheran roots of my upbringing and early schooling in Germany could make sense of Bhakti’s heterodoxy. A codex of merciful relation to others, conscientious work and intense focus on personal spiritual evolution seemed to outweigh rules and rituals. Rational discrimination and doubt were also encouraged as faculties that are meant to operate in a sytem of ethics similar to the Judeo-Christian “Ten Commandments”. My memories of the multi-denominational approach of my family’s Indian spiritual teacher further emphasized these ideas of polyvocal truths.

49 During my Masters works of 2004, Protectoronauts, I started to deliberately use the idea of “attributes” to my works (in that case psychological protection suits), that occurs in the deity iconography of the Hindu pantheon, to signify particular superhuman powers and special qualities. Some examples might be a chest armour made of lotus petals to protect the heart, a built-in heart incinerator to protect against affection, a deep-sea snorkel to help in the case of an emotional tidal-wave, and so on.
2.3.2 Indian-style White-washes, Plaster and Pigments

These early material experiments using plastic toy-parts and cardboard, rendered with plaster and painted. Their formal cohesion was relatively random. In their paradoxical relation to machinelikeness, different surface finishes gave different meanings, such as metal shim, aluminium, fake silver and gold-leaf, rice-paper collage, or intricate painting and varnishing. I experimented with whitewashes to achieve the plaster “shells” around my composite objects. I tried to cover and paint them variously with white, black or red bole and ochres, polyester resin, mixed them with acrylic varnish and milk.
Figure 23 and figure 24. Studio experiments for Gods for Small Things, 2005
Indian icon production (Hindu and Buddhist) has traditionally used colour pigment in a symbolic way to show the attributes of the gods depicted.\textsuperscript{50} Hindu Brahmanical icon images in early and mediaeval times used to be covered with a thin coat of stucco, which was painted afterwards with color appropriate to the divinity.\textsuperscript{51} The use of this kind of render was used through out India on the surfaces not only of pottery, terracotta figurines, stuccos and bronzes, but also of buildings and sculptures in stone, wood, and other media.\textsuperscript{52}

The whitewash was often applied as a thin “eggshell layer” of stucco-plaster or lime-wash as priming before the painting was done. Red pigment was used beneath these washes, probably prepared from red ochre, as watery pigment or slip. These painted “eggshell layers” were in fact painted over ephemeral dwelling constructions made of materials like clay, cow-dung, rice-husk and straw. They were rendered with plaster that was washed with a solution made of clay mixed with plain water and painted with motifs as decoration and for ritual purposes.\textsuperscript{53} Folk icons and Hindu icons such as Hanuman or

\textsuperscript{50} For example, in “Buddhist “tantrika” rites, while white and yellow colors are considered benign, the red, the green and the blue are looked upon as malefic” Kumar cites B. Bhattacharya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography (Calcutta 1958), p. 390.


\textsuperscript{52}Archaeological evidence shows that “white-washes, plasters, and pigments were used in “prehistoric rock or cave paintings in Central and Southern India, [as well as on] the ceilings, walls, and sculptures of cave-temples as well as religious and secular buildings [...] in Central, Western, and Southern India, where this tradition continued in some form right from circa 2nd century B.C. to the 19th century A.D.8 But in Northern and Eastern India in general and the Gainga-Yamuna valley in particular we have little evidence for the period before circa 14th century A.D. Since white-washes, plasters and pigments are highly susceptible to decay due to various natural and human vagaries, not enough has survived for evaluation. Structures that were originally white-washed, plastered, and painted have been found in [for example] brick temples [such as] at Bhitargaon, Sarhan Bujurg, Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh; in the stupas, temples, and sculptures at Nalanda, Bodh Gaya in Bihar; the temples and sculptures at Bhubaneswar, Konarak, Puri, Orissa, Khajurahol and Madanpur in Madhya Pradesh and the stupas at Mohenjodaro in Sindh.”

\textsuperscript{53} Kumar describes some examples of these types of structures: “The mud-brick structures exposed at the Harappan township of Kalibangan in Rajasthan also bear traces of mud plaster, which is being used in the country-side even today. The walls of a mud or mud-brick house in the rural areas are first covered with a thick coat of plaster, which consists of clay, cow-dung, rice-husk and straw. After the plaster has dried, it is washed with a solution made of clay mixed with plain water. Finally, some floral or religious motifs are done variously in white, black, red, yellow, blue and green pigments. The Harappan terracotta figurines often bear traces of red or deep red wash. Some times they are also embellished with designs like circles.
Kali for example were repeatedly daubed with pigments, so that their features over time actually would disappear under the layers. Red and black paints were made up by mixing clarified butter or oil and vermillion or lamp-soot.54

and thick lines in red paint. The colours used on polychrome and painted Harappan pottery are black, white, red, yellow and green. While the red and yellow are well known ochres, which are widely distributed in Northern India, the black is lamp black or ground charcoal, the white is obtained from gypsum and lime and the green is terre verte (green earth) from the Deccan Trap. It is well known that in pre-Mauryan times the houses and images were essentially made of perishable material like timber, bamboo-screenreed, bone, bamboo-screen, clay, bone, ivory, etc. Not enough has survived for determining whether plastering and painting was involved.” Krishna Kumar, “The Evidence of White-Wash, Plaster and Pigment on North Indian Sculpture with Special Reference to Sarnath”, Artibus Asiae, Vol. 45, No. 2/3 (1984), p.200 [online resource][cited July 2009] Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3249730

54 Some of the recipes for the pigment mixing for painting icons, Siva Lingas, temples and so on are very interesting indeed: "Unripe ebony-fruits, unripe wood-apples, blossoms of silk cotton, seeds of Boswellia, bark of Dhanvan, and acorus; combined with these substances, boil a drona of water and when the mass has sunk to an eighth of the volume, take the sediment, and combine with the following substances: turpentine, myrrh, bdellium, marking nut, resin of Boswellia and of Shorea, linseed, and Bilva fruit. The paste being mixed with these is called Diamond-plaster." Or "Another plaster termed Quasi-diamond is prepared from horns of cows, buffaloes, and goats, apes' hair, buffalo-hide and cow-hide combined with Azadiracht, wood-apple and myrrh." Or "A mixture of eight portions of lead, two portions of bell-metal, and one portion of iron rust is mentioned by Maya, and known by the name of Diamond-compound." “The Evidence of White-Wash, Plaster and Pigment on North Indian Sculpture with Special Reference to Sarnath”, Artibus Asiae, Vol. 45, No. 2/3 (1984), p.203 [online resource][cited July 2009] Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3249730
Forbidden Fruit, 2005-2009, most prominently references the Hindu iconography of the lotus as a symbol of enlightenment. As the flower rises through the mud to bloom, a beautiful flower becomes a metaphor for the human mind opening in an enlightened state. This object is an anthropomorphic, black, open flower that seems sexualized through its colour scheme. It references seduction and the idea of the virgin whore, or the black, racialised "Other". The doll's legs balance its body make it dynamic and comical. It has a spiky bottom, an over-sized flower for a head, spread legs, and a sort of phallic trunk. Its spikes however suggest that the object is not necessarily compliant to its...

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identity. Its giant flower head is blind, its head seems to be its genitalia, it uses its trunk to orientate itself in the world.

Figure 27. Jagat Mata Go Lakshmi From Museum of New Mexico Collections, Santa Fe.

Complexity as seen in the image above is common in Indian popular iconography. I could not help but be influenced by such images as this is an Indian political image of the Holy Cow. Jagat Mata Go Lakshmi is a mid-twentieth century poster from Calcutta representing “the Mother Cow of Good Fortune. [...] We see Bharat Mata milking the cow while a Hindu and a Muslim stand behind her. An Englishman and a Parsi stand behind her waiting for a glass of Milk. Infront stands Yama the God of Death [...] from her side appears Vishvarajlaksmi telling him that he has no claim on anyone who worships the cow. Inside the cow is the Hindu pantheon.\(^5\)

\(^5\) (From Museum of New Mexico Collections, Santa Fe) in Frank J. Korom, “Holy Cow! The Apotheosis of Zebu, or Why the Cow is Sacred in Hinduism”, Asian Folklore Studies, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2000), pp. 193
Golden Calf, 2005 represents my conflicted knowledge as the sacred cow in Hinduism, the sacred bull “Nandi” of Siva and its Christian symbolism as an idol that should not be worshipped. This work represented a key to my inquiry to this project. The title for this work occurred to me from its mechanical awkwardness, somewhere between a clumsilegged cow and a locomotive. It was guilded with fake gold leaf (derived from Chinese devotional Joss papers). It expresses the anxieties that I should have in the face of oriental icons and other polytheistic religions. It also plays with the fascination for the “other”, and the suggestive potential of magic realism and miracle.

Golden Calf 2005 is based on the biblical story of the Old Testament where Moses returns from the mountain after having painfully carved the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. He finds his people in the middle of a frenzied idol worship, dancing around a golden calf. The premise of Judeo-Christian law is that it forbids idol-worship in favour of a single supreme godhead, and hence the enraged Moses smashed the stone tablets. His disappointment in the impatience and disloyalty of the common people was unsurpassed.
Some of my works, like *Cosmic Baby*, 2005 were more self-conscious attempts with overt Hindu reference. To complement the project, I was studying Hindi full time at the ANU and absorbing some Hindu philosophy. The generic bodyshape of the doll-infant form of this sculpture instantly conjured of the venerated form of baby Krishna.

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*Cosmic Baby* 2005 I inscribed the surface with the sanskrit text (using the Devanagari alphabet) of a major mantra that I was already familiar with, dedicated to the goddess *Gayatri*. The *Gayatri* mantra is significant to me as it is the main mantra taught to me during ashram stays in India. Wrapping a text around a figure in a symbolic way references the Vedic medical system that integrate medical and cosmological ideas upon the body. Certain parts of the body - the body's architecture - become channels, openings, vessels for different metaphysical processes to occur. *Gayatri* activates twenty-four divine qualities in the devotee. A literal (word to word) translation can be found in Sadguru Sant Keshavadas *Gayatri: The Highest Meditation*. Dehli: Motilal Bandarsidass Publishers, 1978. Also see Acharya, Pt. Shriram Sharma, *The Super Science of Gayatri*, 2000, p.17 [Online resource] [cited April 2009] available at: http://d.scribd.com/docs/oxfb59noj0nyo9c4j69.pdf

My advisor Dr. Richard Barz, who co-ordinates the Hindi and Urdu language program encouraged me to at least understand some of the historical origins of Hindu scripture, (mainly the Vedas and Upanishads), and some of the contending philosophical discussions therein. He got me to read and re-write some chapters of Dasgupta’s “History on Indian Philosophy”. This is a chapter in “The Ramanuja School of Thought (Ramanuja and Sankara on the Nature of Reality as Qualified or Unqualified”). This was towards a greater understanding of the theoretical differences in Brahmanical cosmology between ideas of the dual
and non-dual, the supreme being as “with form” (sagun) or “without form” (nirgun), and how this affects different types of Bhakti movements. There are different types of devotional approaches and places therein for what one (from a psychoanalytic theory background) might call the “ego”, or the “self”.


61 In its final form, this sculpture actually comes apart. The top part is a lid to a shallow vessel that the baby carries on its back. The interior is gilded. Krishna’s contemporary kitsch rendition is as the naughty, chubby cherub-like figure that steals the butter from his mother’s kitchen and then shows her cosmic love through the glint in his tiny milk-teeth. Richard Barz helped me translate a poem about this scene by the blind Bhakti poet Surdas, who lived in Northern India, around whose memory today is built the Vallabha community at Goverdan and Nathdwara. (It was in part because of Surdas’ poetry that I wanted to visit the present day Nathdwara painter-community as part of my fieldwork).

62 Soulmilk 2009. This object has bird-sized wings and human scale breasts. While the breast are quite naturalistic and earnest, the wings become more stylized; in the round the rear of the object reveals a kitsch cherub’s bottom and stumpy legs. Christian representations of the soul as an anthropomorphic winged creature is referenced, alongside its sexualization through proportionately large breasts and pose.
Other works like *Gold Diggers #1 and #2*, 2005-6 were a radical departure from my self-imposed Hindu iconographic reference, because I was interested in exploring harder, more durable and metallic surfaces. So I experimented with metal surfaces such as construction adhesive, bitumen and aluminium flashing cut with scissors into pieces and laid around my forms. While the latest work *Soulmilk* (2009) takes its cues from representations of the soul, of Lutheran times. It is milk-white, for the colour symbolism of both milk and purity.

### 2.3.3 Drawings: Giant Icons and Installation Ideas 2005-2006

Through drawings I developed my concepts. I began to imagine giant statues of dysfunctional gods with human psychologies, that were meant to protect humans but were either sick of them or totally insufficient. The paradox that was always on my mind was that gods are created in the imagination of people in the first instance, so these images of insufficient gods really reflect the impoverishment of the human imagination of the present.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Figure 32. Drawing of idea for Cosmic Baby, 2005 in installation*
Cosmic Baby, 2005 here has increased to a giant scale. The baby stands in space balancing a large golden plate filled with milk on its back. The idea behind the vessel amalgamates a number of associations to the Visnu cosmology. 

Figure 33. Armless Ganesha Astronaut, 2005 and Figure 34. God is my Shelter, 2006

Armless Ganesha Astronaut and God is my Shelter imagines a kind of apocalyptic future where astronaut suits are already antique the statues are in disrepair and humans are living in their vicinity. The Elephant-god’s arms are missing and on the other head-rays washing and underpants hang to dry. These images reflect my questions about physical shelter, and psychological refuge of religion.

The child Krishna stealing the butter from his mother’s jars and the associated ritual symbolism of ghee, clarified butter. In Hindu traditional farming practices, butter is made by “churning” of milk by hand. Visnu is said to sleep on the cosmic serpent (Shesha Nagar, Ananta Shesha or Adi Shesha) who floats in the cosmic ocean of milk. One of the he Visnu cosmology’s most famous stories is “The Churning of the Ocean of Milk” (Samudra Manthan), a part in which Visnu has to appear as a turtle (Kurma) to support a mountain in the churning ocean.
Deity-float 1 and Deity-floats 2, 2005 were inspired by contemporary religious and political festival parades in India, whose structures are purpose-made, used and destroyed after the event. They are usually ephemeral, of timber, bamboo, papier-mache and the more modern ones will be inflatable, lit up from inside. I have seen several of these types of processions in India and Korea (in 2002). The idea is extended into many floats roaming around a gallery space, as a kind of chaos. These gods were conceived as not self-steered but remote controlled. They have random trajectories, and hence it questions the idea of cosmic alignment and synchronicity. They are meant to be divine but in fact are sightless, mobile but ineffective, without agency or intelligence.
The following drawings started to envision a darker world and cosmos, where the gods are sick of humanity. Gods do not have the constrictions of “duty” towards their creation, so they are morally free to abandon it. In *The Gods are Leaving*, 2006 the Astronaut goddess is a compounded rendition of *Durga* and *Kali*; the Hindu female principle or *Shakthi*, who is at once the representation of life energy but also the wielder of weapons, cannibalism and violence. Here, she is a placid prototype, unisex except for her breasts. I imagined her installed at the ANU School of Art Gallery. She passes her
time by devouring her offerings of a “bucket of arms” (instead of “alms”) a la fast food. Conventional representations of Kali show her wearing a belt of Men’s arms and a necklace of skulls. This idea for the installation was thus a big space full of deities leaving their thrones, plinths, pedestals. Some of them disappear through the walls, while others line up in front of a “Global Exit” sign.

Figure 39. “Somaskanda (Shiva and Parvati with their Son Skanda)”, Tamil Nadu, Chola Period, India, ca. 850-1200), 1200s, bronze, hts 54.9 and 51.4cm, Asian Civilizations Museum Singapore.

Image from “Goddess Divine Energy” [exhibition catalogue], Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney, 2008
Figure 40. Image of Siva statue taken on fieldwork in Rishikesh, India, 2006.

Figure 41. Image of Hanuman statue taken on fieldwork in India in Uttarkashi, India, 2006.
These drawings keep to the formal Hindu and Buddhist convention of the Padmasana, or lotus posture and the lotus-type throne upon which the deity sits. I explored different postures that represent meditation, bestowing “grace” and “fearlessness”, “calling the earth to witness” (in the Buddha’s case) and “royal repose”. Attributes held by the deity and hand-gestures are part of the iconographic language of Hinduism that signify the meaning of the deity’s function.

In this drawing devotees line up in the queue to see God- this references in some ways my positive and negative experiences of receiving darshan (transl. “a glimpse of the divine”; this is a social convention around the visitation times of spiritual teachers in India) in the Ashram in South India. This image infers a kind of “faulty” devotional approach, that results in having the head up the next person’s arse instead of a transcendent experience.
Figure 42 Drawings of installation ideas and casting or projecting multiple bodies.

Figure 43 The next image follows on and starts to consider new materials and techniques, that is, casting human forms. Because of my lack of skill for this technique, I also considered what projection could achieve to imply the presence of infinite amount of supplicating bodies. The object of devotion in this image is not present, the pose revealing a climate of dogma, a psychology anti-individual.
Figure 45. "Examples of shikharas of various Nagara style temples in India (from tenth to fourteenth century A.D.), showing varieties of forms and the extent of self-similar iteration."

My drawings then started to consider how the devotional approach could be represented sculpturally, not focusing on the icon so much.\textsuperscript{68} I envisaged confrontations


\textsuperscript{68} These drawings engaged with the ANU School of Art’s Gallery’s architectural space and mobile walls. I used the idea of a swastika formation for the walls to create a kind of sacred space that echoes temple chambers. I tried positive space and negative space formations, less central focus points, and the viewer to be channeled in different ways. I thought of interactivity, like (quasi) religious paraphernalia for sale at the entrance. I considered projecting onto and into the cavities of my objects, myself performig devotional poses. I drew temple (“stupa”) -like structures that were not built up solidly but made of hanging icons in configurations.
with the more abstract concepts of the divine and how it might conveyed in a gallery space, such as "emanations". These ideas referenced the spontaneous "manifestation" of the divine in places such as rock outcrops, in caves and the like, seen often in India. My final works references the very simplified forms of these natural emanations, river-rocks and the ubiquitous wayside altars of lingam-yoni forms.

Figure 46. Wayside altar (to the river goddess) photographed near my Hindi teacher Yogendra Yadav's house "Nolunna" that is located by the edges of the River Ganga, near its source ("Gangotri"), forty minutes drive from Uttarkashi, India

For example, natural forms reminiscent of the cosmic phallus (Lingam), are often gilded with silver or coloured foils, bathed and can have symbolic eyes either painted or glued on.
I installed *Gods for Small Things* in the ANU Foyer Gallery in 2005. I used a narrow black nook and placed the icons at the back onto variable height plinths. The objects were clustered to co-exist as often seen on family altars.

The space took the form of a symbolic altar structure - the distance to the icons at the end produced hesitation in the viewer in approaching. The theatricality of the dark nook should evoke mystery and a sense of timelessness. The floor before the works was covered with loose pieces of Chinese Joss paper gold, from which the orange edges had been trimmed off, leaving them relatively inconspicuous of their origin. The paper on the floor was to incite the viewer to either take off their shoes or not to enter.

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conceptual justification was to evoke the often institutionalized distance to the icon in a formal ritual space. Overt gilding and donating funds to sacred sites and places of worship adds material value through artistic renditions in precious materials. This is one of the contradictions that is picked up in the ideas of Bhakti, which emphasizes the unprecious, the non-material, the comprehensible and discursive, the less artificial vernacular.

My intent was to explore whether the body grounds the mind in real time and the physical world – but whether it also is the thing that needs to harnessed, controlled and transcended for the spiritual experience. The architectural space, in turn, not only houses the sacred relic. It is also there to facilitate some part of the body-transcending process; through darkness, coolness, heat, scent, music, crowdedness or solitariness, visual splendour, ritual, mesmeric movements or words and so on. It is the land-bridge to the viewer's inherent capacity for flights of fancy, for their capacity to suspend belief for the sake of intense experience. I drew architectural references from experiencing temples and from textural references (a most profound experience was the black, giant carved face of Siva at the temple of Elephanta outside of Bombay). The formal merging of the deity's body and the architectural surrounds is visible images of the Antal temple at Srivilliputtur.

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Relevant in developing my ideas about objects in installation in gallery and museum spaces have been Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Homi Bhabha's "The Aura and the Agora", and Carol Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (*Re Visions: Critical Studies in the History and Theory of Art*) (See my bibliography for details).
3.1 “Producing” the Aura of an Object

It would seem impossible to discuss the sacred in art without pondering the aura. My understanding of the aura is that it is that which produces desire in the viewer. Desire engages the imagination. In this case, desire is directed towards the viewer’s contemplation of the work of art and the evocation of the artwork’s Nachleben (literally, “afterlife” I take this here to mean its palpable and ongoing being experienced through memory), that is, its affect\textsuperscript{72}.

The possibility of “aura perception” became relevant in this project when I started to reference the static icon and the devotional approach towards it. Throughout this project I have developed a very ambivalent relationship with the concept of the aura. This has been because the final display for this project will be of static sculptures. The objects are hard cavities, capsules, evoking ancient stones in lieu with furniture. They are inhabitable, but not wearable. My previous reliance on audience/performer participation through wearability of objects has been disrupted through the static display. If I (myself) am to act as performer engaging with the works, I will be enacting –demonstrating. It will be lonely, not discursive. I am no longer sure that the audience can comprehend an immersive state as enacted (i.e., mimetic immersion). I feel that an immersive state has to be felt. What I can achieve in this work, however, is to leave traces of immersiveness in the space for the viewer to encounter. In choosing not to be present in the space, the

viewer re-enacts the performance in their imagination. They could not have this experience if I was physically present in the space.

In past works, I have harnessed the desire for action by exposing the performer to the demand for improvised action. Improvisation also requires intense focus and an immersive state of the performer towards a transformative experience in the art encounter. My demand for this project has shifted: I hope to produce a desire for stillness and immersion, through lack of action ... I feel that my attempt to reinscribe the sculptures with my own performance is problematic. So at the end of this project, I intend to investigate, how, through elaborately crafted objects, psychologically custom-made, symbolically laden, as a sole participant, I enunciate my position of uncertainty.

It has been theorized that the aura is produced in the perception of the viewer, rather than the object and its installation. Today the way of perceiving the aura is highly compromised by the changing nature of spectatorship. The aura in general has been theoretically associated to the gaze and to the location of (ocular) desire. Kevin Murray cites Robert Hughes' concept of “the long look”, the ritual of art devotion, as having expired: “Instead, [the gallery] is a space for the restless contemporary eye, seeking constantly changing views and connections”73.

Georges Didi-Huberman argues that the conceptual decline of the aura of the image in Walter Benjamin's “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is dialectically linked to the idea of its origin. However, to merely foreground the “reproducibility”, the “loss of originality” and the “origin”- while it makes the aura “archaic” and links it to the world of cult images - does not “ultimately make the aura itself fall away and disappear”.74 One can think of the aura in contemporary media to be

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present in a "scattered" form: no-where and ubiquitous at the same time. Weber calls this the "mediaura", or the "mediatic articulation," arguing that the media exposes the aura as "inscribed in, and as, a network".  

In apprehending the aura, Didi-Huberman argues that a temporal model is necessary to account for its memory (like the Waburgian idea of the Nachleben) that enfolds indestructibility, transformability, and anachronism. He argues that there must be another way to "understand "subject matter"- the "subject" as the "matter". Instead, he proposes, one should look to how an artist "manoeuvres the image making substance" to produce desire in the gaze of the viewer (my emphasis). This is enfolded in the "dynamic of labour" – the process of making art.

Didi-Huberman suggests that the aura can only ever be suggested, not known. According to Walter Benjamin, to feel the aura of an object is to have one's gaze returned - i.e., we invest the object with the ability to return our gaze. In this sense Benjamin's idea transposes the responses of a human relationship on to the relationship to an inanimate object. Didi-Huberman says that the perception of aura also entails a constructive effort.

Arthur Danto's The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (1981) and also Rosalind Krauss' The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (1985).


76 "In Warburg's work, the term Nachleben refers to the survival (the continuity or afterlife and metamorphosis) of images and motifs—as opposed to their renascence after extinction or, conversely, their replacement by innovations in image and motif. [...] Warburg conceived time as a counterpoint or counter-rhythm to influence fact and chronology, a ghostly and symptomatic time." In Georges Didi-Huberman, "Artistic Survival -Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time", Translated by Vivian Rehberg and Boris Belay, in Common Knowledge, 9.2 (2003) Duke University Press, pp. 273-4.

on the part of the artist to foment desire in the gaze of the viewer. With this the artwork's plastic reality and formal labour offer a heuristic opening for the viewer.

To produce desire in the performer/viewer has been part of my artistic goal. My artistic strategies have entailed inciting physical engagement that should provide heuristic openings for the viewer/performer.

Another work from the artist N.S. Harsha shows a similar aim. Harsha has presented extensive workshops involving children, while also making paintings and installations. In interview in Mysore during 2006 he explained to me that he felt unhappy about the pressure to produce a product at the end - as for example from his children’s workshops at various biennales.\textsuperscript{78} So he coordinated what he called a “collaborative project” with

\textsuperscript{78} Such as the Artists Workshops at the 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial of Japan 2002 and the Third Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Arts, Brisbane, Australia 1999.
children from TVS School in South India. The white cloth shadows were pasted onto the hillside with flour and water by a team of helpers. The children had conversations with Harsha beforehand and then their “collaborative” engagement with the work was only to pick a shadow to stand near for a period of several minutes. Harsha’s instructions to them were simply to “be”, to feel and to think. Afterwards they described and discussed their experiences of the event. This work iterates art as an experience and emphasises the individual’s part in the extent of the experience.

3.1.1 Framing the Aura: the Pedestal

The sculptures for *Cosmic Recharge* attempt to draw formal relation between icon, aura and frame the pedestal. Walter Benjamin states that “inapproachability is in fact the primary quality of the cult image”\(^7^9\). Religious architecture often functions like a stage set to the highly choreographed ritual institutions surround it, and the art institution has been likened to it. In *Cosmic Recharge* I seek to harness quasi-religious theatricality through a gold-leafed floor that seduces and distances the viewer simultaneously. It serves to isolate the white objects standing upon it and as a kind of barrier for the viewer’s shod feet to approach.

Anticipating the changing contexts of sculptural practice (i.e., its escape from the conventions of the plinth-based gallery viewing) in 1978, Rosalind Krauss coined the term “the expanded field”\(^8^0\). Michael Fried in 1967 had previously argued that theatre was now the negation of art – since Minimal art’s objects were now understood to produce a situation that includes the beholder actively. Fried critiqued Robert Morris’ emerging concepts of Gestalt perception of the whole work from all angles in a mediated space (through light and so on). In these works the viewer had a more reflexive experience (or phenomenological awareness) in space, the single constant now being the relation the


\(^8^0\) See Krauss, “Expanded Field”, 1979
body to the artwork. The viewer thus became the artwork's subject; the beholder's body so involved in viewing. For example, Fried suggested that the scale of Morris' works required more distance from the object – like the physical and psychical distance in theatre. Fried argued against multi-media art works (such as those by John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg) stating that the theatricality would make the object superfluous and degenerate. However, Fried argued for an "instantaneousness" and a "presentness" of artworks to defeat the effects of theatre.

In the Cosmic Recharge project I have used the formal concept of the plinth, or pedestal to convey the idea of life-size "plug-in stations", or "docking ports" for the human body. By this I mean that to produce an aura, the physical isolation and elevation of the object (or icon) has long been a conventional strategy. Kevin Murray states that the confinement of the walls and plinths in the white cube "secures" our gaze. This should mean that the gaze of today's "viewer", "spectator", "user" or "client" is not so easily procured. Already Walter Benjamin in 1937 analyzed the way viewing had changed due to the moving image; the hungry gaze now "roams", rather than rests. Neither the space where an art object is shown be neutral, nor can a pedestal be. Both are coded structures of meaning through which an object is read. Both the Modernist "White Cube" gallery space and the plinth are familiar, clean white spaces whose lines do not interfere with the form of the object and it is thus presented to the viewer to contemplate it from all angles. Murray however states that the screen is surpassing the convention of plinth-viewing in the new Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne as a case study. On field trip in 2006 I perceived a very similar phenomenon

82 Kevin Murray, "The Plinth in the Age of Digital Reproduction", 2003 page 3-4
of screen culture in the Museum of Asian Arts in Singapore. Today's gallery displays
demand more speculative (i.e., screen based, moving) ways of seeing; nothing happens
on the plinth, the object is dumb, the plinth has been rendered dead space – that is, an
aura-free space. The screen "flattens" the world.5

My works use the conventional method of plinth-viewing in the round. My (own)
presence will be in the space in the "flat" format of the digital projection. Perhaps this
will be a spectral presence, even a prescriptive one. In view of what I want to say about
the paradox relation of dogma to spiritual inquiry, I feel that this is appropriate.

The sculptures themselves reference the plinth format (and all its attending theories) and
thus need to be static, viewed in the round. The difference is that these plinths are seen
to be "wearable", or "inhabitable", thus merging the devotee/viewer to the structure
that elevates the icon/artwork. Conceptually, the devotee/viewer thereby becomes the
icon/artwork.

In this sense, the sculptures, while being displayed conventionally, make the "viewer"
simultaneously a "user". This is a contemporary way of referring to the audience in
digital media works.6 This brings my "old looking" sculptures into the present and gives
a contemporary logic to their technological titles as Plug-In Stations for Cosmic Recharge.

5 Murray calls the screen a kind of mirror that the viewer looks into, where the world appears as a kind of
spectacle. To paraphrase Murray, the plinth now seems un-elegant and it ruins the seamless avenues that
are designed for the smooth flow of visitors through the gallery spaces. He sees fluidity and transparency
becoming a dominant aesthetic, where images are recessed into cavities, projected immersively onto over-
size walls, onto floating or perpendicular walls, the floor, hanging sheaths, onto white objects, water-
surfaces, the outside of buildings, and so on. Thus Murray poses the question: "So where today does the
object go to find recognition as a thing-in-itself? Does the screen offer a way of realizing the beauty of
objects as receptacles of the here and now?" Kevin Murray, "The Plinth in the Age of Digital Reproduction",

6 To Penny this is a sign that the encounter with art is no longer one of "passive contemplation but of
active engagement and on going interaction with quasi intelligent systems through time." Simon Penny,

What is important to me here is the suggestion of an intelligent object that is capable of a reciprocal relationship with the viewer.  

3.1.2 Icons and Plinths: Baroque Altars and Indian Lotus Thrones

Figure 49. The Wieskirche (literally “meadow-church”) in Bavaria (1754)

87 Penny suggests: “The crisis of sculpture is still to come. What place does sculpture have in a world of disembodied power? Sculpture belongs to the world of empires and fortresses. [This] define[s] the domain of sculpture: tangible power. But when a lone investor-hacker at a computer in Singapore can destroy a major international bank at her other side of the planet, […] punching keys, sculpture is in crisis. The problematic discontinuity between the ultra-tangibility of sculpture and sculptural practice and the ephemeral temporality of informatics is a case study in the cultural phase-transition of our times and sculpture is caught in the crux of it.” Simon Penny, “Systems Aesthetics and Cyborg Art: The Legacy of Jack Burnham”, Sculpture, Vol 18 no 1, Jan/Feb 1999, p 3
In the creation of my final body of work, *Cosmic Recharge*, I have drawn architectural references in Germany and in India. I am not so much interested in the "visual piety" of the architecture that invokes devotion, but its formal attributes. I grew up around such spaces through both my mother and father’s work; in this sense, my influences have turned a full circle. The Wieskirche (literally "meadow-church") in Bavaria is a relatively small late Baroque church (completed 1754). It features the most elaborate white ground and gold leafing, fake marble in-painting and relief ornamentation. The altar is the central focus, almost perspectivally receding in the space, distancing the devotees in the stalls.

Figure 50. Brahma and Saraswati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Shiva and Parvati seated on Lotus thrones

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88 The Wieskirche is also called "Pilgrimage Church of the Scourged Saviour". The figure of the scourged Jesus is the source of miracles including tears in the eyes of the statue. A small chapel was built to house the statue in 1739 and the larger church in 1745-1754. The church was completed in 1754 based on designs by the brothers Dominikus and Johann Baptist Zimmermann and is a masterpiece of 18th century rococo art. Rococo is a late baroque building style dating between 1730 and 1770. The church has been a UNESCO world heritage site since 1983. http://www.wieskirche.de/egeschicht.htm

This image portrays a scene of the Hindu “trinity” of Visnu, Siva and Brahma with their consort-godesses Lakshmi, Parvati and Saraswati on lotus pillows. The lotus pillow or throne is a Hindu convention and it became formally important in this project. Indian icons are conventionally placed upon lotus flowers, pillows or thrones. The romantic notion of gods sitting in flowers has served to subvert my European Lutheran notions of mere rigid architectural frames or thrones, or even torturing devices such as the cross. Ravi Varma’s image of Lakshmi has been copied and appropriated prolifically (as the one below) in India since the advent of Chromolithography. Varma’s images merged Indian and European conventions of representation and it is those that inform much of India’s popular visual culture today.

90 On the religious origin of the Lotus as symbol, Ward cites Edward Moor (1810): “It is indeed quite possible that this symbol, the lotus, found both in India and Egypt, has its beginnings in a race of peoples which divided into two separate groups, one staying in the Nile Valley, and the other crossing Persia into northern India. In India the lotus is attributed to all Brahmanic gods and through them is attributed to the Lord Buddha. As in Egypt, the lotus in India becomes a symbol of the sun; e.g., the sun god Surya is referred to as “Lord of the lotus, father and king.” (Edward Moor, The Hindu Pantheon, (London, 1810), p. 9 and 13). Ward also cites Zimmer “The lotus plays a very important role with Brahma [...] with the Lotus Goddess, and with Buddha. [...] At the time the universe is to be created from the cosmic waters, a lotus issues forth from the navel center of Visnu who reclines on the serpent, Ananta. The lotus opens and gives birth to the creator, Brahma, who then sets about to create an ordered universe out of chaos. The great lotus of Brahma is considered to be of gold (gold being an incorruptible metal). [...] Thus the Indian mind develops from this lotus conception a systematic and well ordered diagram of the world The filaments of this great lotus are the innumerable great mountains of the world full of precious metals. The countries of foreign peoples exist on the outer petals of the lotus, and the place of demons and serpents is on the under side of the petals.” (Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, (New York, 1946), p. 52.) In William E. Ward, “The Lotus Symbol: Its Meaning in Buddhist Art and Philosophy”, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 11, No. 2, Special Issue on Oriental Art and Aesthetics (Dec., 1952), pp. 135-146
Figure 51. *Lakshmi*, after original painting by Raja Ravi Varma,

91 *Lakshmi*, after original painting by Raja Ravi Varma, (1848-1906), India, chromolithograph, 34.5x24cm inscribed in Hindi: Ll.Anant Shivaji Desai; Lc. Lakshmi; Lr.Moti Bajar, Mumbai, Private Collection. The catalogue note states that “Ravi Varma’s establishment of printing enabled everyone to own their own coloured image of lakshmi, and the popularity of this iconic image of a four armed Lakshmi standing graciously on a lotus, within a lush, idyllic landscape, is attested by the number of extant copies.” Image from “Goddess Divine Energy” [exhibition catalogue], Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney,
3.2 Wearable Pedestals 2005-2007

Figure 52. *Lotus-clad Radha and Krishna*, Punjab Hills, Basohli, India, ca. 1730 (opaque watercolour on paper, 18.4 x 13.2 cm, Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu Collection. Image from “Goddess Divine Energy” [exhibition catalogue], Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney, 2008)
This romantic image from the eighteenth century has inspired me as it shows the conventional lotus-throne converted into a wearable twin-sleeping bag to accommodate the cosmic function of Radha’s union with Krishna. To me it is a deconstructive rendition of a psychological vision of what the physical pedestal can become in the right emotional climate between two lovers (or in the case of my work, performers!). The throne in this image replaces clothes, eliminates hierarchy, unifies and provides privacy.

3.2.1 Performance Experiments (Post Fieldwork in India), 2006 - 2007

My second review after fieldwork in India in 2006 revealed a crossroad in the work. I installed a large solid figure, with some experimental flame-like mesh on top, and two suits that I made for Anna Simic in A Cage Opera. The suits were raised on to high plinths, and two undergraduate students (Rozalind Lemoh and Sarah Firth) volunteered to perform in them for me during the review. I instructed them using my former method. We had a meeting to brief them on their garments and my ideas for associated tasks. I instructed the performers to just “be” which is part of the dichotomy of performance and improvisation of “acting” versus “enacting”.

The following day they put on the garments for the performance and were left to improvise their “inhabitations” of them. Thus Sarah (in the gold) had her prawn-like tail filled with peanuts, while Roz sat up high, unable to move, her feet in foam high-heels, writing spontaneous text onto small note paper. The review lasted about one hour. Roz became more isolated and uncomfortable on her perch, while Sarah took the opportunity to make a nutshell mess and by agitatedly cracking and pegging the shells around the room. It was very humorous after the other students left, as essentially they were not allowed to speak or engage with the panel and myself.

Formally this review served instructive for me. Raising the performers onto monument-like pedestals was an ideal way to isolate them, their activities and intensify their visual
presence in the space above the viewer. The island-like platform of the plinth makes it logically unlikely for the performer to stay up there for any length of time, by contrast with an icon over centuries. This creates a tension of anticipation in the performance. I started to envisage mobile rolling plinths for performing “icons” that they could move about a gallery space with and interact or “plug into” other wearable components.

The review clarified that I should merge the garment with the plinth, so that the person, garment and plinth become one unit, blurring the boundaries between art object and plinth, icon and pedestal. The plinths should have idiosyncratic amorphous outgrowths, which should correspond to the icon’s psychology or attributes. This also freed the objects from overt references to existing religious iconography which had become too restrictive.

Figure 53. The Sculpture Workshop space set up anticipating the performance during review.
Figures 54-57. The performances by Roz Lemoh and Sarah Firth taking place at the review.
After my third review in 2007 I tried myself in performance. I used the idea of the veil again to give myself space to do this. Ironically I wanted the challenge of the exposure so I took all my clothes off under my deliberately dysfunctional veil that really does not cover, hide, or protect anything. I was not very free in this test, but it reminded of a lot of the things that I had picked up in dance practice years earlier towards my art making process.

Figure 58 to Figure 61. Performance test, Location Kiola, photographs by Richard Butlin, 2007.
The veil corresponds functionally to my earlier works which emphasize interior vision, of being hidden from the viewer's gaze, or being more real and present inside a new "skin" (the new skin, or shell, being in the form of paper garment-sculptures). In the effort to become physically, visibly present in my own sculptures during the PhD project, the veil acted as a security.

Veiling the performer to the point of invisibility to the viewer ruptures the whole idea of performance, that relies so much on the narrative aspect of face and gestures, on the subjective presence of the performer or at least the abstract phenomenology of the body on stage even if the movement language is non-linear or non-symbolic.

Obviously the veil, the *burqa*, is worn by Muslim women and their image in the Western media perception is one of suppression. I felt very wary of imitating the patronizing of the stereotype, and to engage with the veil in my own work. Especially bearing in mind the works of my contemporaries such as artists Shazia Sikander, Tejal Shah, Nilima Sheikh and Nalini Malani from India and/or Muslim origin. My work is certainly about cross-cultural identity, non-fixable world views and the questions of belonging. But they do not use it in a political way. In my practice it has precedent in the form of completely covering paper-sacks ("Clouds", 1995-97), hollow but wearable sculptures ("Empapered Bodies" 1997-1999) and paper astronaut suits ("Protectornauts" 2000-2004).
Being obscured to the viewer, for the performer intensifies the phenomenological space of the interior of the sculpture. The performance process can then be less focused on the audience and their experience. The tension between “looking inside” and being looked at should keep the performer activated. It is about both exposure and vulnerability. In improvisation the performer is faced with the dilemma to spontaneously source from within themselves, and to exterioize it to the spectator. Especially in performance, the practitioner’s attention is balanced half inside, half outside of themselves.

3.3 A Cage Opera 2005-2007: What is at stake in performance?

My collaboration with theatre performer and performance artist Anna Simic became a laboratory to explore my ideas about performing the object. Our two exhibitions together\(^94\) posed interesting problems about the absence and presence of the performer in installation. The critique of both shows clarified questions I had regarding the final body of work for the PhD; how things I make are to be worn or not, how the viewer engages with the work if the body is present. The aftermath of the performances also formally take their toll on the installation, which is not always to the benefit of the aesthetic concept. This body of work enabled me to focus on some aspects, and leave behind others.

\(^94\) Two different stages of the *A Cage Opera* project were shown in 2005 (Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne) and 2007 (Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra). Each show comprised of objects, video and sculptural garments and performances.
Our *A Cage Opera* project (2005-2007) ran alongside the PhD project, and explored literal theatricality.\(^5\) Elizabeth Wright in "Psychoanalysis and the Theatrical" argues that the "the subject is theatrical through and through."\(^6\) Post Freudian psychoanalysis and postmodern theatre challenge the idea of a simple mimetic experience or deferral of subject position between the viewer and the performer. Postmodern analysis of the "discontinuities in the narratives of the subject" proposes that "identity [is] bound up to the dramatic"\(^7\) On a performative (i.e., playful) relation between subject and object. Wright argues that there is real *risk* at the heart of all play (or performance, or enactment), because real effects can happen within a subject position — that is, a lasting *affect* — a discursive construct.\(^8\)

On reflection, within the parameters of the *A Cage Opera* project, the method of our collaboration seemed to come into conflict with my expectations of a performer's interactions with my sculptures. Our two exhibitions also left my role in the collaboration formally relatively unresolved. The distinctions between "acting" and "enacting" became especially problematic. I began to question how the spontaneous relation to the objects either felt satisfactory or not. I acted as witness in the exchange with Simic. I must emphasize here that Simic and I were constantly in dialogue during these sessions and that the act of witnessing is not passive. Simic has a very visceral and dialogic relation to objects. In the private improvisations in the studio, the relations felt extremely satisfying.

\(^5\) We set out to develop four iconic characters that we would display in pairs of photographic tableau. Each pair would be a character in its "ideal" and opposite "dysfunctional" state. (Please see our catalogue for more description of each character.)


\(^7\) Elizabeth Wright, "Psychoanalysis and the Theatrical", in *Analyzing Performance, A critical Reader*, edited by Patrick Campbell Manchester University Press, Manchester 1996, pp.175-6

\(^8\) Wright proposes: "The post Freudian theatre, in the wake of Lacan, reveals theatricality as a necessary element in the construction of the subject. Its effect is to make the subject [artist and spectator] experience the gap between the body as a discursive construct and its felt embodiment in experience, between the representational and the real, and to expose it to continual risk of re-definition." Elizabeth Wright, "Psychoanalysis and the Theatrical", in *Analyzing Performance, A Critical Reader*, edited by Patrick Campbell Manchester University Press, Manchester 1996, pp.188-9
My responses as witness were equally unplanned and un-programmatic, but responsive to Simic in situ. So the reciprocity had a powerful effect and was all notated through visual documentation.

The performances of *A Cage Opera* in the exhibitions of 2005 and 2006, had to incorporate discussion about using dress rehearsals. As our idea was to keep a (even

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99 Garment and photography Hanna Hoyne. Please see the discussion of the *A Cage Opera* Project and relevant catalogue in the Appendix. The image shows Anna Simic during one of many studio experimentations in 2005 and 2006. I created the garment–type structures on the spot and photographed Simic as she began to inhabit them through character, voice and gestural improvisation. Anna Simic during studio experimentation 2005. Garment and photography Hanna Hoyne. Please see the discussion of the *A Cage Opera* Project and relevant catalogue in the Appendix.
though mimetic) creative dialogue going through out the performances. We loosely structuring the improvisations to reproduce them for the audience.100

This was not a perfect solution for either Simic or myself. The second, CMAG exhibition was a key towards my end works in that I wanted to take control myself of my objects in performance situations. It provided unexpected results in the way the audience perceived our roles in performance and how they bound the whole creative project together. This has led me to perform myself in the end work as a way of resolving and exploring these issues.

The four characters, Grey (2005), Gold (2006), Pink (2007) and White (2007) were resolved to different stages. Grey was the first performed in Melbourne (2005), its theatricality was very effective, however, my role remained unexplored. Gold’s pedestal was never completed and so she remained left behind. To install Pink and White in the CMAG exhibition (2007) Simic and I really tried to engage both of our roles with the objects.

In view of the sculptures for my Cosmic Recharge project, I decided against welding structures (as for Grey’s cage) or fabric covered surfaces (such as Gold’s). The pedestal for Pink (the Discomfort Lounge) in my view did not accommodate the body contours enough, and hence I left it behind. I also did not carry through the kind of “retro funk” look of Pink’s objects, as that is more of a Simic aesthetic. The White sculpture really shifted my whole understanding of form around the body, and its hard white and gold

100 Simic was actually largely improvising. Her performance was her sculpture/conceptual object. This was her crafted response, so there was no point further staking out my territory upon it, considering that I had already created her “stage” in terms of objects and garments. What was not clear to the viewer was the fact that each of our “sculptures” were actually co-conceived through extensive conversations. The final product was then executed by the respective artist. During the show in 2007, I was performing my witnessing role and changing Simic’s garments at half time. This was in a sense an honest replication of our creative process, only that Simic’s improvisations now responded to the audience at large, not to me. The gallery space at CMAG was a sculpture and video installation and hence the performance needed to be programmed around it. Mapping the space around objects and our pre-existing concepts of each character became restrictive. We also decided to lock the door to the space so that the viewers could only see Simic from outside. I also remained watching outside, entering occasionally. The effect was that Simic was in a fishbowl, under enormous amounts of pressure from an audience crowding in around her space.
surfaces still were somehow inviting for the body. So White was carried through towards the Cosmic Recharge Plug-In Stations.

3.3.1 The Grey Character 2005

The idea for the Grey Character was one of repression and military discipline. It had a cage that constricted the freedom of its personality. The metal strap construction of the Constrictor Cage was made according to Simic’s body measurements. In exhibition without Simic present, the garment was displayed on (or worn by) the cage.

![Figure 63. Drawings for the Constrictor Cage as the Grey Character- icon wears it.](image)
Figure 64. The Grey Character’s Constrictor Cage displayed at Dianne Tanzer Gallery in 2005. The metal strap construction of the Cage according to Simic’s body measurements and fitting the garment around the cage.
Figure 65. Anna Simic in performance, wearing part of the Grey Character’s Constrictor Cage displayed at Dianne Tanzer Gallery in 2005
3.3.2 The *White* Character 2006

The ideas for *White*, or the “isolation and man-eating” icon most of all informed the last body of work of *Cosmic Recharge Plug-In Stations*. Through drawings I developed the pedestal for *White* as connected to the walls, her garment becoming part of the architectural structure, as a hard shell. I had ideas for projecting the performing body (naked) onto the shell. The colour white in this work evokes architectural whitewash.

Figure 66. Drawings for the “isolation and man-eating” icon’s pedestal other objects in the space around her also look plinth-like and suggest a kind of function, and also its hard garment-shell becoming part of the architecture.
Figures 67 and Figure 68. Wall mounting idea and final solutions for White's suit and contour-hugging Plug-in pedestal. Pockets for the hands on the sides.
The final design for the Standing Plug-in Station for White. It came in two parts so the performer could get into it. The final version of this plug-in station rendered and gilded displayed at Canberra Museum and Gallery in 2007. The two pieces stood apart to reveal gilding and suggest the performer’s absence.
Figure 70. Simic in studio improvisation in 2006 wearing White. The custom built Plug-In Station was not completed at this stage, so we improvised with other types of plinths.
Figure 72. Simic performing *White* at CMAG in 2007
3.3.3 The *Pink*Character 2007

Figure 72. Drawings for the wearable pedestals of *Pink*: the "domestic dish-brush icon".

This character was meant to be based on a neurotic housewife a la nineteen fifties. Her plinths reflected her crazed domestic efforts at cleaning and scouring to perfect her capitalist home. We thought that the colour *PINK* would be pretty, bubble-gum, or "neurotic". All of her pedestals and accessories were initially conceptualized with embedded brushes that she could rub against. These Plug ins in particular helped me to conceptualise the works for *Cosmic Recharge*. We solved the absence of the performer by video of her in the space around the objects.
Figures 73 and 74. *Pink's Discomfort Lounge* started as being a “fricition chaise-longue” that looked like a coffin or a tomb (pieta). It was conceptualized with a disfunctional headpiece that she would put her head into like an old hairdressing machine. The viewer, from the other side would look in to see a small hidden monitor with the video of Simic performing *Pink’s* facial expressions.
Simic performed the “ideal” pose of *Pink*, wearing ginger-grating spoons on her feet which were excruciatingly uncomfortable. Her hyperbolic behavior would vasselate between uncomfortable perfection and hysteria about the discomfort experienced in holding the “ideal” poses of icons.
3.3.4 The “Gold” Character

This is an early drawing for the Over-Abundance Crustation Icon, Gold. Gold was meant to be a shiny golden ueber-mother that has been bred to produce offspring efficiently. In her hysterical state, we conceived her as a kind of malfunctioning cornucopia that finally shoots out eggs at rapid fire like a tennisball machine that has a defect.

For the sculptural components of GOLD, I imagined that complimentary wearable objects would hang in the space, of the same fabric of the icon’s garments; so upon wearing or plugging into them the figure would become obscured by the sculptural forms encasing it.

GOLD was formally never resolved and we did not end up displaying her in any of our exhibitions.
Figure 79. Simic performs *Gold* in the School Of Art Photomedia Studio in 2005. *Gold* was never resolved.
The following images are conceptualizing the Canberra Museum and Gallery glass space as a laboratory envisaging Simic's performances. For this exhibition we only showed Pink and White. White was quite a self-contained character, while Pink was high-action. So in developing the ideas through drawings, there are wall-mounted connecting points or Plug-in Stations that suggest certain actions that she might improvise upon. The space was a sealed glass box, the door locked to the viewer. After our presence in the space and Simic's interaction with the objects, traces remained. We envisaged brushes and Velcro everywhere to rub against and get stuck to. I saw a long line of high heels stuck to the floor that Simic could get in and out of. Above the row of shoes fixed to the glass were suction-cap handles for Simic to hold and on the outside of the glass were headphones for the audience to hear her.
Figures 81 to 85. These images show the plinths becoming interactive with embedded brushes and extrusions to rub against. They try to accommodate the body-form and at times restrict the body (the brush walls are very close together so the body has to go through like in a car wash.)
PLINTHS WITH EXTRUSIONS

PINK SUIT

BRUSH + FRICTION SOCKETS

GLOVES W BRUSHES SUSPENDED IN SPACE

BRUSHES SUSPENDED IN SPACE

MIRRORS

BATHROOM CABINETS OPEN + CLOSE BRUSHES INSIDE
CHAPTER 4
SACRED SPACE

4.1 Cosmology as Orientation

In his Chapter “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred” in his book of 1959, The Sacred and the Profane- the Nature of Religion, Mircea Eliade distinguishes between hierophany (manifestation of the sacred), theophany (manifestation of the divine or a god), and kratophany (manifestation of power). During this project, those distinctions have been pondered and explored in my drawings. What exactly constitutes the sacred/the divine/or power? And how could it be manifest? Does a manifestation need to be literally physical? And how can one be sure of its reality? How can a devotional or sacred experience be replicated (or evoked) in the contemporary gallery framework? So the questions go on. I wanted to keep the inquiry on the subjectivity of the individual in cosmological frameworks. I wanted my objects to act reflexively upon agency and imagination.

My initial research located my sculptural focus upon the way that these ideas have been constructed in sacred spaces historically in Germany and India. However, during my fieldwork on Indian urban contemporary art, I felt that contemporary works dealing with Indian identity politics, belief and activism developed a much more complex understanding of hybrid cosmologies. I was drawn to discursive, web-based and performative works. Through discussions with my Indian peers, my projected, or imagined links to Indian devotional culture dissolved, and a new and more powerful vision of its complex histories emerged.

I became increasingly interested in how plural cosmologies are dynamic through their instability. Subjective agency and the imagination are formed by and through the
relationship with our cosmologies. Belief, belonging and orientation are intimately linked.

I have used the term “inhabitation” as part of the performance process in my works since 1996. To me this term conjures seeking refuge, making something one’s own, territorializing. According to Eliade, any form of taking territory is to become “cosmicized”- that is, to be ordered and inhabited. He says “settling in a territory is equivalent to founding a world”\(^1\). Further, any kind of creation replicates the divinely created cosmos. Eliade states that the “manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world”.

Eliade polarizes sacred space and profane space – cosmos to chaos. Sacred space reveals an experience of the real, and that which is real-ly experienced\(^2\); while profane space comprises all other space that surrounds it as a formless expanse. This site of the sacred offers an opening or a threshold to transcendence between heaven and earth. The reality on the “other side” is the truly real, while the rest of unordered existence remains aimless and relative. Thus, the religious person seeks to orientate themselves to this portal. In this sense, devotion can be understood as a technique of orientation\(^3\).

Eliade’s analysis of traditional habitations identifies the transfer of the imagined cosmos onto a dwelling as either projection of the horizons, by installation of an “axis mundi”, or by repeating, by ritual, the acts of gods which resulted in the birth of the world. The

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2 He calls this experiencing of the real a “primordial experience”, or a “primary religious experience” that is not merely theoretical. Mircea Eliade, “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred” in The Sacred and the Profane- the Nature of Religion,1959, pp20-23,26, 28-29,30,39, 42

3 Any hierophany (manifestation of the sacred) breaks the infinite expanse of space and provides a fixed point for orientation, a centre. This is, according to Eliade, why many cosmologies provide conceptions of “our world” as the centre for its given universe. “[...] if we remember that the Center is precisely the place where a break in plane occurs, where space becomes sacred, hence pre-eminently real. A creation implies a superabundance of reality, in other words an irruption of the sacred into the world.” Mircea Eliade, “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred” in The Sacred and the Profane- the Nature of Religion,1959, p 45
architectural structures of dwellings reflect the image of the world that any particular traditional culture has. That is, the sky is seen as a giant tent, or a yurt-like dome, etc.\textsuperscript{4}

Thus Eliade counters Le Corbusier's modernist credo that \textit{"the House is a Machine to live in"} by stating that, far more, \textit{"the house is a universe that man constructs for himself by imitating [...] the cosmogony"}\textsuperscript{5}.

Figure 86. PLEASE NOTE that I was not allowed to photograph the carpet in the Kwan Im Thong Cho Temple. Pictured is another similar work in the same Biennale displayed at the National Museum to provide sense of scale. This carpet spelled many English words in dense Chinese-looking script, while the one in the Temple spelled a single word, \textit{"Belief"} Xu Bing \textit{Prayer Carpet}, 2006

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\textsuperscript{4} Mircea Eliade, \textit{Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred} in \textit{The Sacred and the Profane- the Nature of Religion}, 1959, p 52-54
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{5} The cosmic axis in fact could become a surrogate for the actual space: Eliade describes that nomadic indigenous people of Australia carried with them in form of a stick, in order to always be at the center of the world and that it would point the way. Mircea Eliade, \textit{Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred} in \textit{The Sacred and the Profane- the Nature of Religion}, 1959, p 33, 56, 52-54
\end{flushleft}
At the Singapore Biennale Xu Bing made two carpets with his signature “bastardized” Chinese text that spell English words. *Prayer Carpet*, 2006 was installed in the Chinese *Kwan Im Thong Cho* Temple built for the goddess Guan Yin (the Goddess of Mercy) and people were performing actual devotions upon it. They were oblivious to the carpet being an artwork. That particular carpet spelled out “Belief”. The word “Belief” embedded in the carpet undermines the institution of all the devotees orientating themselves towards the altar (and icons). They are all literally kneeling and prostrating themselves on top of “Belief”, physically and conceptually. The word acts to support and contain them, to float their minds, hearts and prayers upon itself. The original proposal

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for the carpet included holy Buddhist text passages, which was rejected as too religiously transgressive by the temple committee.\(^7\)

I was deeply impressed by this work functioning in a devotional space because I still found it successfully transgressive. On the one hand, the artist stages an intervention in a functional devotional space, the intention of which could be seen as “beneficial” to the devotees. However, as they are unaware that it is an art work, they are unaware of the “disruption”, the selfish intentions (or for example any unethical labour towards its production) on part of the artist might cause to their supplications. Even if the devotees knew that they now must kneel on an (avant-garde) artwork to do their devotions, they may not have a choice to avoid it if they urgently need to pray. In this context the artwork and its message becomes a mute functional object and at the same time a manifestation of the artist’s intention in the context of contemporary art. In relation to my work *Cosmic Recharge*, this carpet also presents a delineation of sacred space, with the crucial difference (from Harsha’s work) that the viewer is invited upon it, without knowing that they may be subverted in the process.

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\(^7\) “The fourth piece at Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple caused contention and required relocation. Xu Bing chose to replace an existing simple red prayer carpet with his “Prayer Carpet” 2006, woven with calligraphic script based on a famous Qin Dynasty text, the Xuan Ji Tu. The original text could be read from any angle allowing various interpretations. Xu selected a passage that spoke of belief and faith. Walking on the text was felt by the Temple to be sacrilegious and would cause offense to worshippers. The piece was moved to an obscure upper location at the National Museum. What remains interesting is that the local community – a.k.a. religious communities - carried weight in the curatorial decisions surrounding this biennale. It was a biennale that was overtly cogniscent of location on a micro and macro scale.” Gina Fairley *Belief in Biennales: Singapore’s inaugural biennale takes a leap ... with faith*, *Published in Art Monthly Australia*, volume # 196, December 2006
The single word, “Belief” spelled on the carpet in the Temple, and the dense script on the other carpet on display in the National Museum, featuring proper Buddhist sacred texts about belief and faith. The Xu Bing website explains the concept of the carpet design thus: “The design of the carpet is similar in concept to Hui Su’s Former Qin Dynasty creation the Xuan Ji Tu. In 1620 Hui Su created a grid of 841 characters that can be read in any number of directions and combinations. From this single grid, one can discern nearly 4,000 separate poems. In this fashion, Xu Bing selected passages from four significant faith-based texts (one Buddhist, one Gnostic, one Jewish, and one passage from Marx, all in English translation), which he then transcribed as Square Word Calligraphy, and then synthesized into one text.” [Online resource] [Cited July 2009] Available at http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/2006/magic_carpet
4.1.1 Devotion as Orientation

Eliade's discussion on sacred space provides a point of departure for the discussion of the locus of my work. Here, any cosmology – ordering and inhabiting – ontologically founds the world. Cosmology thus entails ordering and inhabiting of space – and determines a center from which to create horizons, axes and a viewpoint. This point of center –where the self stands - is a sacred space; and thereby the three become synonymous. The center, the self and the sacred space embody a threshold to a dimension beyond. In this project, *Cosmic Recharge*, devotion can be understood as a technique of orientation”9.

I would like to keep with Eliade's idea that devotion is a kind of technique of orientation, but I would differ on the point that the human being will tend to orientate the world towards the self, as opposed to the other way around. My sculptures should read in a way where the sacred space, the center of the cosmos and the self become identical. While for the examination I will show the work in an existing prayer space, I am also obviously overlaying my personal, idiosyncratic prayer-solution over the existing space. The whole thing evokes permanence but is relatively demountable and thus could exist anywhere, like a snail shell refuge. Through its non-static nature the work should be read allegorically on the transience of belief-structures and the varying needs of the psyche in the beliefs that it chooses and draws towards itself during a single life time.

Figure 90 and figure 91. Ana Prvacki, The Leap of Faith, 2006, mixed media installation, shown at inaugural Singapore Biennale of Contemporary Art “Belief” 2006

Ana Prvacki’s work The Leap of Faith, 2006, comprised a large magnetic wall at the end of a space. A video showed people wearing specially fashioned magnetic vests being...
involuntarily drawn towards the wall. Subtitles provided their comments as this was happening. Their comments ranged from the physical to the psychological parts of the artwork’s experience. While humorous and interactive, evoked for me a beautiful connection between the ideas of cosmic orientation, being metaphysically drawn to something or someone by a force larger than ourselves; an abstract mysterious power.

4.2 Final Body of Work (2008-2009)

4.2.1 Propositional Structures Carefully Rendered

My method of working with solid materials is always propositional. Constructing has to be fast so that I can get my ideas out as quickly as possible. I usually work in series, on several pieces at a time. I get an idea quite quickly of what I can or cannot achieve, how structural issues will counter-inform my ideas for the work. In this way the concept is changed by the formal qualities of the works, as they “speak back to me”. Titles will form themselves in my mind as the formal elements start to take shape. Some works will fall by the wayside if they don’t seem to resolve dialogically with the other works. As seen with my early works Forbidden Fruit and Soul Milk, I started these in 2005 and only resolved them in 2009. Rebuilding is also part of my process, so for example all of my suite of six Protectoronaut suits for my Masters work were cut up and rebuilt up to four times each. Material permanence is never as important to me as the idea.
Developing ideas from 2005 towards the *Cosmic Recharge* work, I explored solid materials on their own and in relation to softer structures, as is seen in the *A Cage Opera* body of work.\(^{10}\) While I was gaining skills, the more procedural techniques and materials really ruined the joy of playing with them, and counter-intuitive to my process. So I never completed some of these works.

\(^{10}\) I began in 2005 to create steel rod and steel strap structures that I intended to clad. This method, while quite a lot tougher than my usual sewing machine and bamboo approach, appealed to me quite a lot. The strap and rod can be formed quite easily so that one is almost "drawing" three dimensionally. The downfall for me with these materials were twofold: Firstly from a distance the negative spaces and rods would look as though they were formed into perfect cylinders and spheres (like arms and legs), but once I started to cover them, it became clear that they were very wonky. This really interfered with bilateral symmetry of the body that I was trying to do at that time. Even when I learned how roll strap through the machine my circles were never perfect. This became obvious in the grey cage-pedestal for the *Grey* character of *A Cage Opera*. Even though this welded structure was sand blasted and powder coated, nothing could hide its irregularity. Secondly, the strap needed to be covered with something like chicken-wire or other types of mesh (like flyscreen), then hessian or cloth dipped into plaster of glue. The surfaces were utterly uneven because the basic structure was not right. So the surfaces had to become thicker and thicker, using things like sawdust and straw in them to even them out. This made them incredibly heavy and unwieldy.
Figure 93. The large seated figural structure clad with papier mache and rendered, 2006
Figure 94 and figure 95. I even tried “dressing” one of these large sitting figures so as to lighten them and give them more life-likeness. The fabric I used below was a futuristic (or disco) metallic double-sided lurex, which is a foil-covered spandex. I cut up and remade that particular suit into a suit for the “Gold” character from “A Cage Opera.” Experiments of rendering legs of figure.

My method of fast construction and use of provisional materials is really linked to my concepts of spontaneous improvisation and ephemerality. I am the performer in the theatre of my making. I seek art as the idea, not the object. So I had to find ways to construct large forms that were light weight and material that did not need a power-tool to cut it. Thanks to the provisions of Nick Stranks and Ted Nugent I found that tri-wall cardboard and polyethylene foam was just such a material.

The final three objects (or *Plug-in Stations for Cosmic Recharge*) are all finished with hard surfaces. However, I built the structures for the *Cosmic Recharge* objects out of foam, cardboard, masking tape and construction adhesive. The lecturers in the Sculpture Workshop would often laugh (and cry) at my hollow eggshell type constructs that really had very little structural integrity towards longevity. My reasoning – even though I made great efforts to amend my slap-dash technique to be more considered – was that I really can only see the forms as they happen, I cannot plan them. I had a lot of anxiety about this initially, but my supervisor David Jensz encouraged me to harness my own approach
truthfully and let this be reflected in the formal outcomes. For *Cosmic Recharge*, however, the work in fact looks big, solid and strong, totally betraying its flimsiness.
Figures 96 to figure 101. Foam (polyethylene open cell foam) constructions of packing tape and construction adhesive.
The object surfaces I had always envisaged to be of an icing-sugar smooth and powdery finish: perfect and very unrealistic towards my method. So I resolved to at least to leave them a little more honestly, uneven and not polished. In the beginning I experimented with many types of surfaces, the majority of which reproduced the Indian and Baroque icon white-wash and pigment finishes. Eventually I resolved to let their amorphous surfaces speak about their becoming as the cyclically re-rendered icons of India do, or rock formations that weather with time.

I resolved this dilemma of the “structure-less eggshell” by using plaster mixed with a solution of Bondcrete, which is used to harden cement. It is a PVA with Phenyl resin that relates well with other PVAs and acrylic mediums in paint for example. This can be used in different strengths, and makes the plaster harder, elastic and less likely to crack. This has been particularly important for complex curve surfaces that I made with cardboard sheets that still have flex in them. The Bondcrete and plaster mix can become too hard
for sanding the surfaces (even with a belt sander or an angle grinder and sanding disc). I made my solutions of Bondcrete harder on the base of my structures, and much lighter on the top surfaces. (Like the painting use of “gesso grosso” and “gesso sottile” on top).

I also experimented with different types of membranes within these “shells”. I started with papermache, tissue paper, cloth, cheese cloth, hessian, acrylic cloth, and finally, fibreglass tissue. I love this material as it looks like rice paper or mulberry paper and layers itself very taught around the form when wet. It leaves no creases and saturates extremely well.

The fibreglass tissue first came to my attention through the construction of the fibreglass and resin objects for A Cage Opera. I found resin extremely toxic and struggled to properly coat my large surfaces evenly. I also found that colouring polyester resin white with oil paint did not come out bright. Instead the objects looked dull. So I resolved to paint them with acrylic wall paint and gold-leaf (Using the faux Joss paper) certain areas in a painterly way. I had tried all the different thicknesses and weaves of fibreglass mesh. I stuck with the thinnest tissue, and through conversations with my father who used to be a conservator, began using it with the Bondcrete instead. I really felt comfortable with this method and have ended up using it through out.
4.2.2 Surfaces: German / Austrian Baroque White wash

Figure 106. This is a Baroque pillar relief of a cherub surfaced with white ground, painted and gilded. A green ground is used beneath the white wash to accentuate shadow in the relief work and to set off the gold. (From the interior of the Wieskirche)

Figure 106. This putte head is a replica to made by conservators to show the Polierweissgrund, or polished white ground.

[Online resource] [Cited July 2009] Available at: www.katinka-wessels.de/Galerie_1.html
4.2.3 The Fusion of Baroque Furniture, Artwork and Architecture

The pulpit from the inside of the Wieskirche is just one example of the formal fusion of functional furniture, sculpture and architecture. Baroque churches followed the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* —that is the formal union of a compound of artistic media, techniques and formal outcomes into a whole. This pulpit exemplifies the kind of architectural feature I was thinking of when I was imagining my forms. Only I wanted them to be more organic and not necessarily symmetrical. I had also begun to conceive of the plinths of my objects to merge the body, and those to engage or merge with the architecture.

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12 Image available at [Online resource] [Cited July 2009] Available at: www.katinka-wessels.de/Galerie_1.html
Figure 109. This is the pulpit from the inside of the Wieskirche. This was the kind of architectural feature I was thinking of when I was imagining my forms. Only I wanted them to be more organic and not necessarily symmetrical.
Figure 110 and figure 111. This is a replica of Baroque lattice work that was used as architectural features of church interiors.

13 Available Online at [online resource] [Cited July 2009] http://www.holzwerkstatt-lint.at/main.php?g2_itemId=96

14 Online resource] [Cited July 2009] Available at: http://www.holzwerkstatt-lint.at/main.php?g2_itemId=96
Figure 112 and figure 113. A restorer building replicas of icon image and niche wall altar (below) and a Baroque table being restored.
Figures 114 and 115. Some of my test pieces of 2005 that try to achieve the Baroque look. I substituted traditional materials for cardboard structures rendered with plaster and PVA, white acrylic wall paint, and Chinese Joss paper as faux gold leaf.
View of the Seehof furniture in the galleries of Central European decorative arts and sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

I wanted to make my icon-type forms reference both, Indian stone icons (like lingams and so on) and also Baroque or Rococo furniture.\textsuperscript{17} So I gave the objects small furniture


\textsuperscript{17} Rococo is a form of late Baroque style (ca. 1660 until 1720). In furniture and architecture this style expressed itself as ideals of classical beauty and magnificence, as well as power and pathos in elaborate decorations emphasizing physical might and the power of the natural elements. The increasing wealth of the middle classes in European cities meant that aristocratic lifestyles became more accessible, which resulted in favouring ostentation. This influence really began through the dictatorial reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), in France and this spread throughout Europe. seen most prominently in Munich, Drseden and
legs. This made them look contradictorily heavy and light; iconic and functional. Baroque furniture feet have very tiny tipped toes. As a reference point I used a generic Baroque armchair. I was thrilled to find that the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York had a collection of a room of the Seehof Schloss in its furniture galleries of Central European decorative arts and sculpture. The double-seater sofa appealed to me especially as it looks frumpy and light footed at the same time. I have included front and back view as it is a totally frontal construction, like an icon, decorated only at the front, the back not for viewing.

Berlin. Rokoko was a lot more playful in furniture as well as in interior decorations of palaces, ballrooms, mirror-cabinets and play rooms were dressed in silk wall papers; the differences between the middle classes and court furnishings became less and less; gilding was used for the palaces, wood inlay was used of the middle class. (I translated in paraphrase from ) Helga Doris Buurman, „Die Entwicklung der Wohnkultur vom Altturn bis zur Gegenwart“ [web-resource] [cited July 2009] Available at: http://www.buurman.de/seminare/wohnkultur/barock/barock.html Also see the extensive bibliography on furniture styles on the University of Kiel websites. [web-resource] [cited July 2009] Available at: www.uni-kiel.de/.../31epochen/mainframe1.htm
Figure 117. Baroque armchair, one of a pair, German, ca. 1763-64.

Figure 118 and figure 119. Settee, one of a pair, German, ca. 1763-64.

4.3 Three Objects: Plug-in Stations for Cosmic Recharge

Of six ideas for the designs for a suite of Plug-in Stations for Cosmic Recharge it was decided in my second last review in 2008 that I should only pursue three objects, as that was manageable. The original six ideas were:

1. Embracer (Huggin’ Mama)
2. Cosmic Trumpet
3. Wing Grower
4. Crying Dinghy
5. Soulmate Maker
6. Supplication See-saw

In view of my final installation, I have made the following decisions:

Solution 1: Initially I wanted to deal with the ergonomic body cavities was to make the objects entirely gold, and the negative spaces white, in order to digitally project the body into them. It could also have been a photographic slide projection, as the image would be static. Masking the body off on the slide and precise projection would be crucial for this solution. I decided against this, leaving the forms themselves open for the viewer to imagine themselves into the cavities.

Solution 2: The colours for the final objects are thus gold and white. The gilded part was initially intended for the part that the body touches, or plugs into. These parts become worn with time. The white should be the quality of a well-worn sea shell, abraded by the sea, porous but hard. Finally I decided to make the objects pure white, like sea-worn shells. I hope to achieve this finish by scraping the plaster back while semidry, and in the
process almost polish it. I will use wet and dry sanding for the next layer to fill in any more unevennesses. The last layer will be a solution of water and paint (Titanium pigment would be too expensive as it also requires mixing in fillers and I am too short of time so I will use acrylic wall paint which grips well onto the phenyl resin in the Bondcrete of my lower surfaces).

Solution 3

For the installation I decided against the School of Art Gallery. I felt a user-friendly prayer-room would suggest the functionality of the objects more, rather than distance them more in the gallery space. The space for my examination exhibition will be a multi-denominational prayer-room on campus at ANU. It is a 10 square metre room with a sloping roof. Upon viewing the space, I decided that the objects must remain white and the floor will be comprised of gold leafed (i.e., Joss papered) wood tiles. This golden square will frame my objects. There is a contradiction of having the ridiculous opulence to be walked upon. The gold leaf speaks of value-adding in religious spaces. The Burgman prayer-space is a brightly lit, day-light space, so I will not be able to make it theatrically dark for the gold to work as a rich colour of an incense-filled cave-like space. It can instead be a sunfilled and light space, the gold acting reflective and the light giving a sense of cosmic recharge like the architecturally funneled rays of daylight ("the eye of God") in church spaces.

Solution 4

I will be filmed performing my objects. This performance will be projected on the wall of the space.
Figure 120. Some of the ideas for the Recharge stations. There were also ideas about walls to connect to or plug into, to hide in (like the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem). I imagine negative body cavities.
4.3.1 Three Unrealized Objects: Drawings

Figure 121. The ideas for the twin-seat *Soulmate Maker* (top) and the *Crying Dinghy* (below) with drains for tears to raise the water levels so the dinghy could eventually float on the tears.
4.3.2 Three Realised Objects

4.3.2.1 Wing Grower 2008-9

For the Wing Grower I imagined a reverse-park plug-in that backed into two long, wing-shaped green houses, that looked like the Crystal Palace Exhibition building from 1851. These greenhouses to grow one’s wings into would have been rigid structures made from glass (or plexiglass) and something like lead or aluminium to support and connect the faceted panels. Naturally, this elaborate construction technique deterred me and so I thought that perhaps a soft clear swimmingpool vinyl (that I have used in Soulsearchernaut About to Be Born in 2005) would do the job if I stitched it to give it ribs and spines. I liked the idea of floppy wing pouches hanging off the back of the object, like a chrysalis that has just hatched an insect, whose wings will stiffen in the sun. Finally, I decided against any confusing soft and hard combinations in the objects. Stone-likeness
in their surfaces appeals to me. I will construct hard wing-spoons at the back of the object, for the wings of the performer to conceptually “grow into”.

Figure 123 to figure 128. Drawings for Wing Grower, 2008-9
Figure 129. Myself in front of a trial installation of the incomplete objects in the Sculpture Workshop. I had raised the Wing Grower up high to see what it looked like and to try to imagine some sort of staircase going up to it.
I imagined this plug in station to be high up on a very elevated pedestal because the person who has grown wings in it should finally be able to take flight from it. If it is high up, the person would be able to jump off the precipice to have a bit of a kick start to flying. I conceived of various solutions to the high plinth, including a hidden spiral staircase, steps at the front, a ladder at the back, or drawers up the front face that pull out like stairs to go up. I even imagined a door at the back and a man hole to emerge from. None of these solutions appealed to me aesthetically, and finally I reverted to the low-slung wing-spoon idea.
4.3.2.2 Embracer (The Huggin Mama): Maternal Heart Recharge 2008-9

This work originated in the idea of the giant idols and the devotee being cradled in one of their laps. I aesthetically turned the icon into an inverted armchair that comforts by hugging. So it is a frontal plug-in station, that the person kneels into, rests their face and embraces. It initially was the most solid and icon-like of all the works, requiring something like heavy stone steps. However, once I imagined the Baroque furniture feet on it, it changed the look of the whole fleet.

Figure 130 to figure 132. Drawings for Embracer (The Huggin Mama), 2008-9
The body cavities for these works were made by building up body forms of clay and foam that I shellacked and air dried (thanks to the advice of Nick Stranks). Around these forms I layed my fibreglass, bondcrete and plaster triad in three layers. After air drying, I cut and prised them off, and they were thin, light and elastic, and surprisingly strong. The inside was fairly smooth. This worked very well for the reclining half-figure of the Cosmic Trumpet, but it was a disaster for the kneeling figure (back and front casts) for the Wing Grower and the Embracer. My stylized clay figure looked quite life like in its positive form; but when I took the casts off — remembering that I wanted to use the insides— they were utterly unsymmetrical and just looked strange. So, sadly I had to cut them all up in order to build them into my positive forms in bits. This lost a lot of time and also made the final forms look a lot less literal.

Figure 138. The cast negative figure was inserted into the pre-existing icon torso. I finally discarded the giant legs.
Figure 133 to figure 137. Mould and cast process for the negative space of Embracor, 2008.
4.3.2.3 Cosmic Trumpet (Dream Amplifier) 2008-9

The idea for this came from the capsule like form I had made along the way. To me it looked like a large ear and my Yoga teacher used to say that the shape of the human embryo is relicted in the shell of the outer ear. So I imagined the sleeping human and its cosmic listening (or funneling) device.

Figure 139 and 140. Drawings for Cosmic Trumpet (Dream Amplifier), 2008-9
the umbilical chord could be hung up into a fun-hole

or it could be a large gold leafed funnel with an ear inside for inner listening like a stethoscope (on a pregnant belly)

bodhisattva bring in the Masonship
Figure 141. Hollow capsule for cast to be inserted on Cosmic Trumpet, 2008.

Figure 142. Lying cast of a clay figure that was very successful which I could use directly to build into my positive form.
Figure 143 and 144. The pipe for the trumpet made of cardboard semi circles and masking tape.
Figure 145 to figure 148. The pieces of the Cosmic Trumpet assembled in the studio for the first time in 2009. All the large components have to be made separably for transport. The final version has a drawer in the front face to conceptually put one’s possessions into before climbing into the capsule to rest.
By the time of my last review in March 2009, I had found the ANU Burgman College multidenominational prayer space. It is a square 10m x 10m space with a slanting ceiling, three glass double doors and two long corner windows in the high-roofed end. The floor has a border of white tiles and an inset square of black carpet. I liked the space as soon as I walked into it, and I also instantly knew that I had to cover the carpeted area and gold leaf the floor. This decision came spontaneously out of this encounter.
For my review in the Sculpture Workshop, I measured out the 8m x 8m carpet square with masking tape, and made some calculations as to how many gold leaves I would need to cover the area. Now I have used leaves that are 8 times that original size, so the number is not as impressive, but it has taken eight days and four /five people to do cover 210 MDF tiles (60cmx 60cm).

For the review I tried to arrange the objects in the space in a kind of “sacred” configuration, orienating the highest one to fly out of the window (conceptually). I started to feel worried that the prayer space might be too small for my massive objects. If this is the case, however, I will be appeased by the fact that if I had chosen the gallery space I would never have ended up with a gold leafed floor, which I feel frames the objects well with its faux ostentation.

The discussion at the review seemed to veer away from the idea of my body entering the objects in performance. This actually firmed my resolve to try the performance anyway, because it is answering some part of my enquiry that I can’t quite explain yet. So I will be amongst the objects somehow, not live, but in projection.
5.1.2 Testing the objects 2009

Figures 152 to figure 168 Testing experience of objects. Images Amanda Stuart, School of Art Sculpture Workshop
5.1.3 Testing Devotional Poses (Acting or Enacting)

Figures 169 to figure 180. Testing experience of objects, trying devotional poses. Images Amanda Stuart, School of Art Sculpture Workshop.
5.1.4 The Golden Floor
5.1.5 Cosmic Recharge in the Multi-Faith Prayer Space
5.1.6 The Final Performance
CONCLUSION

The way that the three components of this project finally linked together - the artwork, the studio Exegesis and the Dissertation - has been an amazing process to watch. In terms of bringing home their conceptual volume was, as Gordon Bull, the Head of School, said "like landing three jumbo jets at the same time".

In some ways, the content of the Exegesis and Dissertation could be seen as quite distinct and separate: my aesthetic preoccupation with devotional spaces counter the choice of Indian contemporary artists who make work completely unlike mine. They engage their audiences in digital installations and websites that look new, slick and technological while the appearance of my works is "old worldly". Also their projects often address political issues and a wider pedestrian public directly, while mine remains quite private and self-sufficient. However, this signals an expansion of limits of my conceptual horizon and intellectual universe, rather than lack of cohesion. The intense durational nature of this project produced real intellectual tension through being led by an experimental approach. My Sculpture Workshop panel most valued the critical and experimental processes of the research. This and the extended timeframe allowed me to produce several bodies of inconclusive works that all interrogated my themes, but did not summarize the whole. In this way, I was able to develop a dialectic in the studio work as well as the theoretical work.

In terms of my own artwork's development, I remember sincerely wanting to consolidate my own split sense of belonging and formative experiences in India. I discussed these ideas with Nigel Lendon, the Graduate Course Convenor, and Richard Barz, the Head of the Hindi and Urdu Program at Asian Studies. Their outlook was vastly different and I was
forever trying to integrate their advice into my project without loosing sight of what I was really trying to achieve - I didn’t know what exactly that was yet!!

The first year I attended Hindi classes in the Asian Studies Faculty, read and translated medieval Bhakti poetry from Sanskrit into Hindi, researched Hindu religious ritual. Those ideas translated (like a notation) into small plastered objects in the studio. They were idiosyncratic and naughty icons, conceptually undoing religious piety, in the same vein as the anti-establishment Bhakti poets had done over centuries.

In preparation for my fieldwork, I made plans and budgets and traced my journey on the rail map of India. My supervisor Chaitanya Sambrani’s provided me with about 50 artists’catalogues (unavailable in Australia), to choose contemporary artists I might interview during my journey. I made two lists, a provisional and a preference selection.

I also regretfully remember my fist interview in 2005 with the German artist Wolfgang Laib. He demonstrates explicit interest in Indian spiritual culture. Laib was in at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney for a major retrospective of his work. This interview was a key turning point in myself understanding my approach. I had gone into the interview expecting to find connection and similarity; what I found instead was frustration and utter dissonance.

Laib struck me as “quintessentially German” (for lack of a better phrase) in his approach, who took from another culture what suited him but never truly leaving his own culture to confront his own biases. This was an existential recognition for me, having had a “complete” migration experience from Europe to a “periphery”. In a sense, Laib provided a mirror for me, and I did not like what I saw there. He also represented everything that my parents had deliberately left behind in Germany when they migrated.

My own experiences of acculturation, of otherness and difference could not support Laib’s Eurocentric and Orientalist rationale for his works and supposed connection to India. This moment for me was highly instructive in differentiating myself – not from my heritage- but from my socio-political location and viewpoint. This was a key to my
Dissertation approach, and in my subsequent decisions of making and displaying works for the final body of sculpture. From my post-colonial immigrants position, my works are meant to be activated spaces that can be inhabited by an(O)ther.

Once I stepped on the aeroplane to India for the fieldwork, something shifted for me. I was on my own again, with my back pack, going to meet people and talk to them. I felt released from the formal constraints of all the plans that I had had to do, and looked forward to seeing what I would find. I instantly found connections to contemporary artists in Delhi and Bangalore. From there I was going to go on to interview religious artists working in religious pilgrimage centres. However, at this juncture I decided that the material I was getting from conversations with the contemporary artists was what I really wanted; they shared common ground with me in terms of education and formal language, but were also operating in extremely different circumstances. The religious artists would have required a translator (despite my budding Hindi comprehension), their practice rested on tradition, formal rigour and religion, rather than perhaps self-reflexive inquiry and formal freedom. I was no longer sure that the questions that I had prepared for them were really on the inquiry that I wanted to follow. So instead I continued to Bombay, Baroda and Ahmedabad for more conversations with my Indian peers.

I began to understand that contradiction and scepticism were deeply linked to my own artworks’ holistic and optimistic hyperboles that propose magic realism and aesthetic rapture. So the final choice of two Indian contemporary artists for my Dissertation, do not contradict my questions about universal truths, belonging and spontaneous transformative experiences through art. In interview, the artists voiced similar questions and dilemmas to my own, but found very different ways of solving them through their works. Their discussions revealed that both artists’ existence subsists through a strong poetic, but that they are also highly critical of the myth of the autonomous artist. Therefore they have to find ways in which they are able to let their ethical ambivalence coexist with it. Their devotion to these ethical and aesthetic struggles was outstanding.
Their commitment to engaging their idiosyncratic theories in the larger discourse of contemporary art and the global art market, despite its pitfalls was also very impressive.

Returning to Canberra, my work on the *A Cage Opera* project with Anna Simic further enabled me to prevent my studio work from becoming formal illustrations to the themes of my PhD research. Simic’s diva-like characters allowed for thematic crossovers dealing with icon worship and divine personification both in the traditional as well as in the popular domain, taking references from both Eastern and Western cultural spheres. With Simic, I was sourcing artistic strategies from my past and formulating them into new dialogues with her, as well as experimenting with new material solutions for them. Directorial control, collaboration and facilitation became major issues in our engagement with the art objects in performance situations. I readdressed the performing body in sculpture, wearability of art work, experiential acting versus theatrical enacting during performance, and improvised studio research in which I acted as witness. I was using fabrics and welded steel and fibreglass constructions to create a dialogue with Simic’s performing body. My own role of viewing of Simic’s performance overshadowed my considerations of the role of the audience.

Having completed the *A Cage Opera* project, I was left alone to examine my own body in performance in relation to my objects and to my themes of devotional approaches and transformative experiences. During this project, the search and testing of my own role in performance with the art objects was more pronounced than the considerations of the audience. However, having completed the project, I can now deliberate on that.

I re-entered my search for cultural belonging and began to compose forms reminiscent of Indian, Middle Eastern, and European Baroque pilgrimage sites. The colours gold and white became strong signifiers, as well as handmade architectural surfaces. I became obsessed with body cavities, the erosion of touched, rubbed and prayed upon surfaces, and nooks that people see as portholes to a divine dimension. I began weighing up the experiential nature of the actions of wishing, praying, writing or burning of prayer-
papers, and the meaning of physical orientation within sacred spaces. Thus the work for *Cosmic Recharge* was born.

**Outcomes**

The material knowledge and skill that I have gathered in the Sculpture Workshop is enormous. My aim at the outset was to move away from soft, ephemeral (usually sewn) sculpture, to embrace permanence and larger scale. I began with small cardboard and plastic works rendered in plaster. I then attempted welded steel constructions, clay casts and large foam-built fibreglass forms, which were exhibited in 2005 in Dianne Tanzer Gallery in Melbourne and in 2007 in Canberra Museum and Gallery as part of a collaborative video-installation with Anna Simic titled “A Cage Opera”. I now also include sheet-timber in my making processes. Where previously I tended to only consider still-photography, I may now also include video projection in my installations. The discussions on installation practices and thinking about space, even architectural space, have been invaluable. Conceptual critiques I have received have sharpened my creative working processes.

Furthermore I have acquired theoretical knowledge and writing skills. One of my two focus-artists, Tushar Joag from Mumbai was invited during 2008 to participate in an ANU series of exhibitions about Human Rights, curated by the former Director of the School of Art, David Williams, and Dr Caroline Turner, the Deputy Director of the Humanities Research Centre. I was asked to write the catalogue essay on Joag, which is my first publication of academic writing.

**Changing Ideas**

This project has brought revelations and generated new questions, some of which will remain (and always will remain) in a state of definitive in conclusion. Some of these questions have been in relation to:
1. My own ambivalence towards solid, static and permanent materials. The PhD project’s body of work is entirely solid and installed, only my inferred presence in the form of video ruptures this static viewing. I am envisaging a return to more transient and soft materials, and more engagement with performers in the near future.

2. My own presence in the work as performer (alone) loses the discursive dimension that the joint explorations have. The relation to the objects does not get extended in the same way. Mimetic enaction feels very different from action that comes out of a spontaneous connection between another person and myself. Physical connection, audience address and destruction of works in the process of the creation of a work remains very interesting to me. To me, a sense of “pause” and stillness brought about spontaneously in the viewer’s experience through exposure during active participation can be more powerful than an artificially imposed quietude of an installation. This does not mean that I do not have faith in the presence of my objects. But I still hoard a pedagogic demand for the experience a viewer has through actively participating in a work.

3. Questions of directorial and performative investment in my collaborations. Feedback I have received during the PhD project has been the problem of control in my works. Early on, Michael Le Grand tried to frame my collaborative impulses as a kind “empathetic portraying” of my contemporaries. In the A Cage Opera project with Anna Simic, this was certainly quite close to it. However, I am still convinced that my other collaborative works tended to be more about facilitation, and engagement with the viewer. A kind of transfer of creative ecstasy. During the PhD research, I have allowed myself to let the certainty of my artistic position be destabilized. And so in the final work I myself appear to perform the sculptures; and while the objects still suggest a physical invitation, they also remain inaccessible through the gold-leafed floor.
# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *The Singapore Miracle* by IEPE (Iepe B. T. Rubingh), shown at Inaugural Singapore Biennale of Contemporary Art “Belief” 2006
4. *Figure Empapered Bodies*, studio experiments performed at warehouse, Melbourne, 1998. (Performers Louisa Duckett, and Jacob Lehrer).
5. *Figure 5. Empapered Bodies* performance, Canberra, 1997, (performers Anna Simic and Jane Magnus.)
6. *Cloud Skin*, 1998, performed at warehouse in Flinders Lane, Melbourne (performer Hanna Hoyne)
11. *Dot Painting*, performed for *Odd Productions* at Empress Hotel, Melbourne (performers Antonia Pont and Hanna Hoyne), 1998
12. *Dot Painting*, performed for *Odd Productions* at Empress Hotel, Melbourne (performers Antonia Pont and Hanna Hoyne), 1998
15. N.S. Harsha’s work *Cosmic Orphans* 2006 shown at Inaugural Singapore Biennale of Contemporary Art *Belief* 2006.
16. Vasudha Thozur *Self Portrait on a Funeral Pyre* date, image supplied by the artist in 2006.
17. The photograph shows Thozur with the siblings of the Gujarati Muslim women holding up their works.
18. Photo from the series *Faces with One Feature*, at the Singapore Biennale 2006.

19. Figure 19. Photo from the series *Faces with One Feature*, performance at the 7th Sharjah Biennial, 2005.


22. Wayside altar to Siva photographed in Delhi in 2006.


25. Studio image of construction of *Forbidden Fruit*


27. *Jagat Mata Go Lakhsmi* From Museum of New Mexico Collections, Santa Fe.


32. Drawing of idea for *Cosmic Baby*, 2005 in installation.


34. *God is my Shelter*, 2006.


36. This is an example of such a festival sculpture, a Ganapati street festival. The image is from a contemporary blog site. [online resource] [cited July 2009] Stable URL: www.rmdhar.com/.../ganapati_visarjan_1rs.jpg


39. “Somaskanda (Shiva and Parvati with their Son Skanda)”, Tamil Nadu, Chola Period, India, ca. 850-1200), 1200s, bronze, 54.9 and 51.4cm, Asian Civilizations Museum Singapore.

40. Image of *Siva* statue taken on fieldwork in Rishikesh, India, 2006.

41. Image of *Hanuman* statue taken on fieldwork in India in Uttarkashi, India, 2006.

42. Drawings of installation ideas and casting or projecting multiple bodies.

43. The next image follows on and starts to consider new materials nad techniques, that is, casting human forms. Because of my lack of skill for this technique, I also considered what projection could achieve to imply the presence of infinite amount of supplicating bodies. The object of devotion in this image is not present, the pose revealing a climate of dogma, a psychology anti-individual.


45. “Examples of *shikharas* of various Nagara style temples in India (from tenth to fourteenth century A.D.), showing varieties of forms and the extent of self-similar iteration.”
46. Wayside altar (to the river goddess) photographed near my Hindi teacher Yogendra Yadav’s house “Nolunna” that is located by the edges of the River Ganga, near its source (“Gangotri”), forty minutes drive from Uttarkashi, India.

47. Test installation as part of a student group show in in the School of Art Foyer Gallery in 2006.


49. The Wieskirche (literally “meadow-church”) in Bavaria (1754)


51. Lakshmi, after original painting by Raja Ravi Varma

52. Lotus-clad Radha and Krishna, Punjab Hills, Basohli, India, ca. 1730

53. The Sculpture Workshop space set up anticipating the performance during review.

54. The performance by Sarah Firth taking place at the review.

55. The performance by Sarah Firth taking place at the review.

56. The performance by Roz Lemoh taking place at the review (David Jensz in foreground)

57. The performances by Roz Lemoh taking place at the review.


63. Drawings for the Constrictor Cage as the Grey Character- icon wears it.

64. The Grey Character’s Constrictor Cage displayed at Dianne Tanzer Gallery in 2005. The metal strap construction of the Cage according to Simic’s body measurements and fitting the garment around the cage.


66. Drawings for the “isolation and man-eating” icon’s pedestal other objects in the space around her also look plinth-like and suggest a kind of function, and also its hard garment-shell becoming part of the architecture.

67. and Figure 68. Wall mounting idea White’s suit and contour-hugging Plug-in pedestal.

68. final solution for White’s suit and contour-hugging Plug-in pedestal. Pockets for the hands on the sides.

69. White’s Standign Plug-In Station at Canberra Museum and Gallery in 2005

70. Simic in studio improvisation in 2006 wearing White. The custom built Plug-In Station was not completed at this stage, so we improvised with other types of plinths.


72. Drawings for the wearable pedestals of Pink: the “domestic dish-brush icon”.

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73. *Pink’s Discomfort Lounge* started as being a “friction chaise-longue” that looked like a coffin or a tomb (pieta).

74. It was conceptualized with a disfunctional headpiece that she would put her head into like an old hairdressing machine. The viewer, from the other side would look in to see a small hidden monitor with the video of Simic performing *Pink’s* facial expressions.

75. Simic performing *Pink* on the *Discomfort Lounge* and with the *Foot Wobbler* (a floor cleaning poof) at Canberra Museum and Gallery in 2007.

76. Simic performing *Pink* on the *Discomfort Lounge*.

77. Simic performing *Pink* with the *Foot Wobbler*.


80. Drawing for wall mounted interactive stations.

81. These images show the plinths becoming interactive with embedded brushes and extrusions to rub against. They try to accommodate the body-form and at times restrict the body (the brush walls are very close together so the body has to go through like in a car wash.

82. As above.

83. As above.

84. As above.

85. As above.

86. PLEASE NOTE that I was not allowed to photograph the carpet in the Kwan Im Thong Cho Temple. Pictured is another similar work in the same Biennale displayed at the National Museum to provide sense of scale. This carpet spelled many English words in dense Chinese-looking script, while the one in the Temple spelled a single word, “Belief” Xu Bing *Prayer Carpet*, 2006.

87. Devotees praying at the temple, image from the Singapore Biennale website.


89. As Above.


91. As Above.


93. The large seated figural structure clad with papier mache and rendered, 2006

94. I even tried “dressing” one of these large sitting figures so as to lighten them and give them more life-likeness. The fabric I used below was a futuristic (or disco) metallic double-sided lurex, which is a foil-covered spandex. I cut up and remade that particular suit into a suit for the “Gold” character from “A Cage Opera.”

95. Rendered legs of figure.

96. Foam (polyethelyne open cell foam) constructions of packing tape and construction adhesive.

97. As Above
Foam and fibreglass constructions made for *A Cage Opera* in my garden during the summer of 2006-2007

This is a Baroque pillar relief of a cherub surfaced with white ground, painted and gilded. A green ground is used beneath the white wash to accentuate shadow in the relief work and to set off the gold. (From the interior of the Wieskirche)

This putte head is a replica to made by conservators to show the *Polierweissgrund*, or polished white ground.

These facial features show gilding onto polished plaster casts prepared with red bole. This gilding is very highly finished so that it looks almost laquered, or spray-finished.

This is the pulpit from the inside of the Wieskirche. This was the kind of architectural feature I was thinking of when I was imagining my forms. Only I wanted them to be more organic and not necessarily symmetrical.

This is a replica of Baroque lattice work that was used as architectural features of church interiors.

A restorer building replicas of icon image and niche wall altar (below) and a Baroque table being restored.

Some of my test pieces of 2005 that try to achieve the Baroque look. I substituted traditional materials for card board structures rendered with plaster and PVA, white acrylic wall paint, and Chinese Joss paper as faux gold leaf.

View of the Seehof furniture in the galleries of Central European decorative arts and sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Baroque armchair, one of a pair, German, ca. 1763-64.

Settee, one of a pair, German, ca. 1763-64.

Some of the ideas for the *Recharge stations*. There were also ideas about walls to connect to or plug into, to hide in (Like the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem). I imagine negative body cavities

The ideas for the twin-seat *Soulmate Maker* (top) and the *Crying Dinghy* (below) with drains for tears to raise the water levels so the dinghy could eventually float on the tears.

Drawing for *Supplication See-Saw* 2008-9. I made the chassis for this work but have not completed it yet.

*Wing Grower*, 2008-9

Drawings for *Wing Grower*, 2008-9
124. As Above
125. As Above
126. As Above
127. As Above
128. Myself in front of a trial installation of the incomplete objects in the Sculpture Workshop. I had raised the Wing Grower up high to see what it looked like and to try to imagine some sort of staircase going up to it.
129. Drawings for Embracer (The Huggin Mama), 2008-9
130. As Above
131. As Above
132. Figure 133 to figure 137. Mould and cast process for the negative space of Embracer, 2008.
133. As Above
134. As Above
135. As Above
136. As Above
137. The cast negative figure was inserted into the pre-existing icon torso. I finally discarded the giant legs.
138. Drawings for Cosmic Trumpet (Dream Amplifier), 2008-9
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145. As Above.
146. As Above.
147. As Above.
148. The Last Review, 19th March 2009 (objects unfinished)
149. As Above.
150. As Above.
169 to 180. Testing experience of objects, trying devotional poses. Images Amanda Stuart, School of Art Sculpture Workshop.
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